



spiritual vibe

*Find me someone whose song is really celestial, because it is the outburst of the cosmic urge to sing, and I shall hear the music of the spheres.* ~ Dr. Ernest Holmes



# The Celestial Gift of Music

Kent Rautenstrauss

**W**as he being funny or “New England practical”? Dr. Ernest Holmes, founder of Religious Science, was conversing with his friend Peggy Lee, the noted jazz singer, about a passionate love song she had just recorded, “Fever,” which was to become her signature song. A few seconds elapsed when Dr. Holmes said with a perplexed expression, “It sounds kind of interesting, but why would *anyone* want to have a fever?!” The famed chanteuse explained that it was *not that kind of fever!*

Whether or not this story is factual, the undisputed fact remains that music has elevated the spiritual “temperature,” or consciousness, in Religious Science communities since Dr. Holmes first began lecturing in the late teens and 1920s on “change your thinking; change your life.” Through the decades, music, in conjunction with the spoken word and spiritual practice, has played a crucial role within our spiritual communities in fostering a profound experience of the Divine. Dr. Holmes might call it the demonstration of the voice celestial: the “thing itself.” St. Augustine, a man for another time, would say it differently, “He who sings, prays twice.”



Ernest Holmes and Peggy Lee

### **Young Holmes Connects to Music and Musicians**

In *Ernest Holmes: His Life and Times*, brother Fenwicke Holmes writes about a time in 1915 when he and his brother participated in a pageant in Venice, California. “I myself wrote the lyrics, which were set to music...and Ernest read preludes to the acts.” The reader might imagine how twenty-eight-year-old Ernest might have caught a glimpse of the power of music and the spoken word on such a day. “He made my lyrics sound like poetry!” Fenwicke said.

Years later, Fenwicke reported that an opera singer “with a magnificent voice” attended a talk and asked his brother for prayer support. She was preparing for a recital in New York City’s Carnegie Hall, but was crippled

by intense fear. “I will ‘treat’ you so that you will not be afraid of anything or anybody. You are a trained and gifted artist...you have already proven yourself,” Ernest said, adding, “I am going to attend your recital...When you really get ready to let out [a high note], don’t forget God and the angels....You can reach them with high C.” The recital was a huge success and the singer profusely thanked Ernest, but also asked, “What will I do next time if you aren’t there?” “God and the angels will be,” Ernest assured.

### **The First Musical Expressions**

According to Rev. Jack Kastle, former minister of music at Denver’s Mile Hi Church and past chairperson of the International

New Thought Alliance (INTA) Music Committee, the musical repertoire first shared in our movement was likely “from the sacred literature of the time, e.g. oratorios, hymns, and cantatas.” A classically trained soloist sang such timeless and weighty musical selections as “The Lord’s Prayer,” “He Shall Feed His Flock,” or “The Holy City,” accompanied by a pianist or organist. Audio recordings from Dr. Holmes’s radio program *This Thing Called Life* document that dramatic organ accompaniment, common for the time, often underscored his oratory as well. The musical repertoire of Religious Science expanded through the decades, Kastle said, to include Broadway music such as *Carousel*’s “You’ll Never Walk Alone” and contemporary pop songs such as “I Believe,” “Without a Song,” and “I’ll Walk with God.”

Creative individuals were especially drawn to Holmes’s philosophy of being “open at the top,” including film director Cecil B. DeMille, actors Rhonda Fleming, Cary Grant, and Mickey Rooney, and television stars Robert Young and Art Carney. Best-selling creativity author Julia Cameron, in her foreword to *Creative Ideas*, offered this explanation: Dr. Holmes can make us “believe

in a benevolent and supportive world, a world friendly to our dreams and desires, our hopes and aspirations....Holmes makes The Great Creator accessible as a power within us all.”

### **A Legendary Musician Inspired by Dr. Holmes**

In her autobiography *Miss Peggy Lee*, the Grammy-winning singer wrote, “It was not until I met Ernest Holmes that I would realize that we live in a universe that is primarily spiritual and that it is possible to get everything we need...health, money, happiness...through the scientific application of prayer and meditation.”

She recalled a time when she went without sleep for days due to a project deadline. “When I’d start buckling from exhaustion, I’d call Ernest Holmes, who would say, ‘Remember, you’re not the one doing the work. It is not I, but the Father, He does the work.’ I would think about that, and it did help to refuel my strength and energy.”

In 1947, Peggy Lee wrote “It’s a Good Day” with her husband Dave Barbour, inspired by the affirmative message of her spiritual friend.

*Yes, it’s a good day for singing a  
song,  
And it’s a good day for moving  
along;*



Ernest Holmes &  
Richard Froeber

*Yes, it's a good day, how could  
anything go wrong,  
A good day from morning 'til  
night.*

### **Dr. Holmes the Songwriter**

Another favorite soloist, Richard Froeber, sang at Dr. Holmes's annual birthday parties and co-authored songs with our founder in the 1950s. Here are some of Holmes's lyrics, set to Froeber's music:

*I said a prayer for you today; a  
simple prayer I often pray  
A prayer I always like to say for  
those I meet along the way.  
This prayer, my friend, was just  
for you; that you'll be  
blessed in all you do.  
In ev'ry thing that you pursue  
and may all your dreams  
come true.*

"My organist and I always knew when Ernest came into the

building. We didn't have to see or hear him. It was a vibration that you could feel," Froeber is quoted as saying in Dr. Marilyn Leo's book, *In His Company: Ernest Holmes Remembered*.

### **Religious Science Hymnal Created**

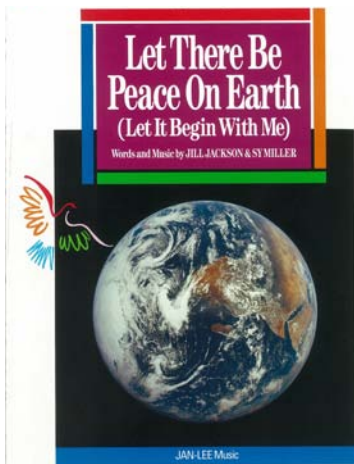
Froeber's organist, Irma Glenn, renowned for her musical artistry, served as editor-in-chief of a first-ever *Religious Science Hymnal* in 1954. "This hymnal presents...a joyful acknowledgment of the Divine Presence indwelling every living being," she wrote. "Let us lift our hearts and our voices in affirmative song through which may be gained inspiration, strength, and healing." The hymnal was used in many of our centers for years.

### **Let There Be Peace on Earth**

In 1955, Jill Jackson and her husband Sy Miller wrote a song born out of their friendship with Ernest and Hazel Holmes. "Let There Be Peace on Earth," or simply "The Peace Song," debuted on Easter Sunday 1955 at the Beverly Hills Church of Religious Science. Many centers still sing this song, and the song has bridged different faiths.

*Let there be peace on earth and let  
it begin with me.*

*Let there be peace on earth, the*



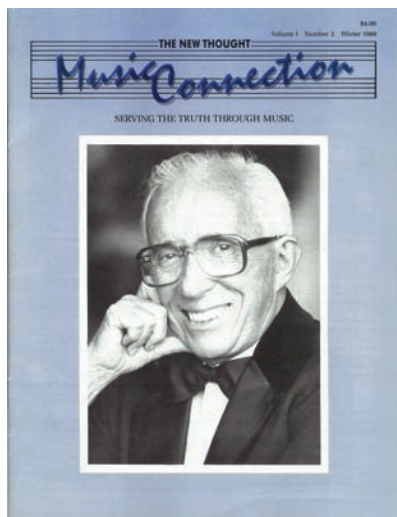
Original Sheet Music Edition  
Piano/Vocal Arrangement  
by John Brimhall

*peace that was meant to be.  
With God as our father, brothers  
all are we*

*Let me walk with my brother, in  
perfect harmony.*

### **Grounding and Resonant Joy**

Ernest Holmes, along with the charismatic Dr. William Hornaday, spent much of the 'fifties building the parent church, Founder's Church of Religious Science, in Los Angeles. When Hazel Holmes died in 1957, a grief-stricken Ernest pondered how to create a lasting memorial in her honor. In *That Was Ernest*, Reginald Armor wrote, "Hazel had been an artist in her own right; and she had loved good music." Suddenly, Ernest caught a vision. "There must be an organ, a beautiful organ, a magnificent instrument," he declared. Bill Hornaday agreed,



George Goulding

and soon money poured in for the Hazel Holmes Memorial Organ Fund. This was not a typical church organ but an instrument of grounding, resonant joy—a large theater organ.

Ironically, when Dr. Holmes himself passed in 1960, Founder's organist Dr. George Goulding discovered on the day of the service that the trumpet pipes of the theater organ had slipped slightly off the wall. In an entertaining account no doubt embellished for effect, Goulding reported that Dr. Holmes didn't like some of the sounds of the new organ and, therefore, could have mischievously "directed" the pipes to fall off the wall by his sheer will. Only Ernest knows the real answer, but Goulding later said, "He was a fascinating man with a fantastic sense of humor."



Bob Ralston

At a memorial for Dr. Holmes in New York City's Town Hall, Peggy Lee sang "The Lord's Prayer" for the first time in tribute to her "guardian angel." "I didn't falter," she said, "and when I actually reached the high note at the end, I truly felt that I was being held up there."

### **Music after Dr. Holmes**

Music continued to play a prominent role in the life of Religious Science churches after Holmes's passing. At Founder's Church, Dr. Hornaday's radio program cued up with the song "Look for the Silver Lining." According to Dr. Arthur Chang, Hornaday moved away from classical music toward Broadway and pop music, even playing the marimba occasionally during services. The goal was to make the service music accessible and reflective of contemporary culture.

Songs like "I Gotta Be Me," "Life Is What You Make It," and "Accentuate the Positive" were shared throughout many centers, often with solo keyboard accompaniment. Church choirs formed during this time. *Your Hit Parade's* television singer Giselle MacKenzie serenaded in many churches, and television fitness trainer Jack LaLanne, not known for his musical abilities, robustly sang at Redondo Beach Church of Religious Science.

In the 'seventies, Religious Science churches began to expand their music departments by adding additional instruments, but piano and organ still anchored the typical musical expression. During this time, Bob Ralston, organist for beloved ABC Television bandleader Lawrence Welk, began subbing at Founder's Church, finding the Religious Science teachings "refreshing and free of evangelical doctrine."

### **It's in Every One of Us**

In 1975, another breakthrough song captivated the hearts and voices of many Religious Science churches [in this movement], "It's in Every One of Us," by David Pomeranz. The song was featured in the Tom Hanks movie *Big*.

*It's in every one of us to be wise.  
Find your heart, open up both  
your eyes,*



Vocal group Alliance

*We can all know everything  
without ever knowing why,  
It's in every one of us by and by.*

Another musical milestone occurred in 1985 when three men formed the vocal group Alliance. Jerry Florence, Keith Kimberlin, and David Ault were attracted to the message of best-selling author/speaker Dr. Louise Hay, who taught that people are inherently good-enough right where they are in life. The three began singing at the “Hayride Service” in Hollywood, and before long were touring nationally. “Nobody else was touring at the time, much less singing original music,” Ault reflected recently. Louise Hay’s theme song, “I Love Myself the Way I Am,” written by Jai Michael Josefs, became an impacting song of the time.

*I love myself the way I am, there's  
nothing I need to change.*

*I'll always be the perfect me,  
there's nothing to rearrange.  
I'm beautiful and capable of being  
the best me I can  
And I love myself just the way I  
am.*

In 1988, Bob Ralston took over as organist at Founder’s Church, a position he holds to this day. A couple of years earlier, a marvelous four-manual theater organ was installed, becoming the largest Wurlitzer theater pipe organ located in any church in the world.

By the end of the 'eighties, music in the Religious Science movement undertook a paradigm shift of presenting original music expressing the teachings of Religious Science. Ralston arranged and composed original music for Founders, including holiday cantatas. Jack Kastle also composed many New Thought–appropriate songs and, with his





Photo by Carl Studna

Drs. Michael Gott, David Ault, Karen Drucker,  
Melissa Phillippe, and Kent Rautenstrauss

musical wife Jill, organized two successful New Thought Music conferences that brought together musicians from all over the United States with a united mission to serve the truth through music.

Musical superstars John Denver, Della Reese, Ben Vereen, and later Larry Gatlin, Kenny Loggins, Carl Anderson, Stevie Wonder, Olivia Newton John, Chaka Khan, and Melissa Etheridge dropped by Religious Science centers to share their music. Many of them attributed the Religious Science teachings with uplifting their artistry.

### **The Historic Agape Sound**

History was made in the late

'eighties, when Dr. Michael Bernard Beckwith, founding minister of Agape International Spiritual Center in Culver City, California, and a huge music lover himself, invited a guest singer, Rickie Byars, to share music at Agape. "He was the only minister to ask me in advance what I was going to sing," Rickie said. "I thought, what does it matter; you aren't going to sing with me! But later, I found out that Michael wanted to know what the lyrics were, because if they didn't support the teaching, why sing it?"

The two clicked musically and personally and began writing songs together. In 1990, they

shared a new chant at the Asilomar Summer Conference in Pacific Grove, California, that captivated the attention of conference attendees. “It was a chant written in the old gospel way from the heart of Africa,” said Rickie. The song became an immediate and resounding hit throughout the movement.

*I release and I let go, I let the  
Spirit run my life  
And my heart is open wide, yes,  
I'm only here for God.  
No more struggle, no more strife,  
with my faith I see the light;  
I am free in the Spirit, yes, I'm  
only here for God.*

The rest is musical history. Rickie BB and “The Rev” married and began creating the “Agape sound” with easy-to-sing chants that ring deep and true in the soul.

### **Music in 2012**

Today, our centers are alive with the artistry of music. Great attention is placed on finding or creating music that aligns with the transformative teachings of New Thought. The local music ministries are dedicated to serving their communities; the list of traveling spiritual artists is lengthy, and this is yet another paradigm shift. Their contributions are deeply acknowledged.

“We’ve grown a lot!” says Rickie BB. “We have the most



Rickie Byars Beckwith and Rev. Dr. Michael Bernard Beckwith

diverse music,” says Arthur Chang, citing the inclusion of world music. “All cultures have something spiritual to offer that is relevant. Good music belongs to everyone.” Dr. Christian Sorensen of Seaside Center for Spiritual Living in Encinitas, California, says, “I don’t have music for entertainment purpose. I use it for shifting consciousness.”

St. Augustine’s statement that “He who sings, prays twice” and Dr. Holmes’s understanding of the “voice celestial” speak to the consciousness embedded within music, and this remains its most transformative gift within our centers. ■

*This is the way life works...It  
forever sings to songs of its own  
being.*

*This song bursts forth from the joy  
of its own inner wholeness.*

*We, too, could become part of  
this celestial choir if we knew how  
to rightly affirm life.*

~ Dr. Ernest Holmes