

*South African teens
use music to honor
Christ at Christmas—
and all year long.*

SING PRAISE TO HIM

By Richard M. Romney
Church Magazines



Zintle Vuyiswa Njoli, 16, remembers when she was 12 years old and drifting away from the Church. “I was a recent convert, brand new in



Young Women. I felt uncomfortable and a bit kept out,” she recalls. “I started back-sliding. I was discouraged and I didn’t want to come anymore.” Then music came to her rescue.

“A Relief Society sister came to my house. She knew I loved music, and she gave my mother a stack of CDs with Church music for me to listen to. I couldn’t resist. When I came to a hymn called ‘Be Still, My Soul’ [*Hymns*, no. 124], I cried and cried. The words said exactly what I needed to hear. After that, anytime I felt upset or disheartened, I would sing those words to remind me to be patient and trust in the Lord. That song brought me back and kept me in the Church.”

Today Zintle is an active, happy member of the Kagiso Ward, Soweto South Africa Stake, joining other youth singing sacred Christmas hymns during seminary. She says music should play an important role in the life of all teenage Latter-day Saints, not only at Christmas but always.

“We read in the scriptures that the Lord is there for us, that when we do what is right, He’ll always be on our side,” she says. “The Christmas hymns reassure us of the same things, and so do the other hymns we sing throughout the year.”

And Zintle isn’t singing a solo when it comes to praising the Lord through music.

With Heart and Voice

Her friend and fellow ward member, Smangele May Dimakatso Merafe, 16, says hymns remind us to be grateful, to live a righteous life, and



to share the gospel with others. “There are hymns about every part of the gospel that I love,” she says. “There are hymns about the Book of Mormon, about Joseph Smith, and about prayer. There are hymns about Heavenly Father, about feeling the Spirit, and about the Savior. One of the great joys of Christmas is singing about the Savior.”



(Above) Zintle Vuyiswa and Smangele Merafe say music adds meaning to their worship. (Far left) Vuyo Dasha, Parker McOmer, Haley Westover, Katie Rae McOmer, Travis Alexander, and Kjirsten McOmer sing hymns in Pretoria. Nativities are by Stephen Kyalo, a Latter-day Saint from Kenya.

FILLING OUR SOULS

“Hymns can lift our spirits, give us courage, and move us to righteous action. They can fill our souls with heavenly thoughts and bring us a spirit of peace.”

First Presidency Preface, *Hymns*, x.



A GIFT OF MUSIC

Teens aren't the only Church members in the Pretoria South Africa Stake celebrating the holidays with music. Twenty-year-old Michael McLeod wrote an entire cantata (a presentation of words and music) about the life of the Savior, answering the question, “If we had been there, would we have known He was the Christ?” The presentation has been so popular that it's been performed in a variety of locations. Michael considers it his gift to the Church and the community.



NEmore

For a video about music in South Africa, including parts of the cantata, go to newera.lds.org or ensign.lds.org.

She says there are many hymns we traditionally consider Christmas hymns, but that there are many others that could also be sung in celebration. One of those is “Praise the Lord in Heart and Voice” (*Hymns*, no. 73). “Tell of him in loud acclaim,” it says. “Sing the wonders of his name.” Smangele says that's a great message for the holidays.

Marching in Pretoria

In another city to the northeast, teens in the Pretoria Ward are also remembering the birth of the Savior with music. Amy Vermeulen, 16; Vuyo Dasha, 18; and Travis Alexander, 17, each play the piano and sing. They look forward to Christmas as a time when music is especially meaningful.

“Worthy music invites the Spirit whenever you listen to it,” Travis says, “It's one of my favorite parts of Christmas, to worship the Lord through song.”

Amy agrees. “Worthy music is the kind of music that will help us feel closer to the

Savior,” she says. “When I play the piano, I’m very picky about the music I play. It has to mean something to me, it has to uplift me, and I like to feel confident that it will uplift others as well. I love to play the Church hymns. They uplift me and bring a spirit into my home that I couldn’t bring in any other way, and my family appreciates it.”

“I’ve seen the influences of both good and bad music,” Vuyo says. “With bad music, you might not think you’re listening to the words, but they are being registered in your brain, and they can play back at times when you’re feeling alone or discouraged and you might think that Heavenly Father doesn’t care. But uplifting music encourages the feeling that Heavenly Father loves us and that He and His Son are always there for us. Whenever you’re in doubt or alone, maybe when you’re in temptation, you will know that Heavenly Father is there and you can hum your favorite hymn to uplift your spirit.”



(Far left) Michael McLeod wrote a cantata about Christ that was presented throughout the community, while (below) Rugo Nortje and others decided a great way to celebrate was by counting their blessings.

A GRATEFUL CHRISTMAS

In addition to music, youth in South Africa are grateful for many things at Christmas. And they offer this suggestion: Rather than worrying about what you’re going to receive this year, remember how much you’ve already been given. Here are some of the blessings for which they express thanks.

“I’m thankful that the Prophet Joseph Smith restored the gospel,” says 12-year-old Rugo Francois Nortje of the Pretoria Ward. “And I’m grateful for the Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ. I’m thankful to know that President Thomas S. Monson is our living prophet today.”

“I’m grateful for my testimony that the Savior lives and that He loves us,” says Amy Vermeulen, 16. “I know that as we strive to be obedient, He will help us.

I’m grateful to know that Heavenly Father answers prayers and that He will show us the things that He needs us to do.”

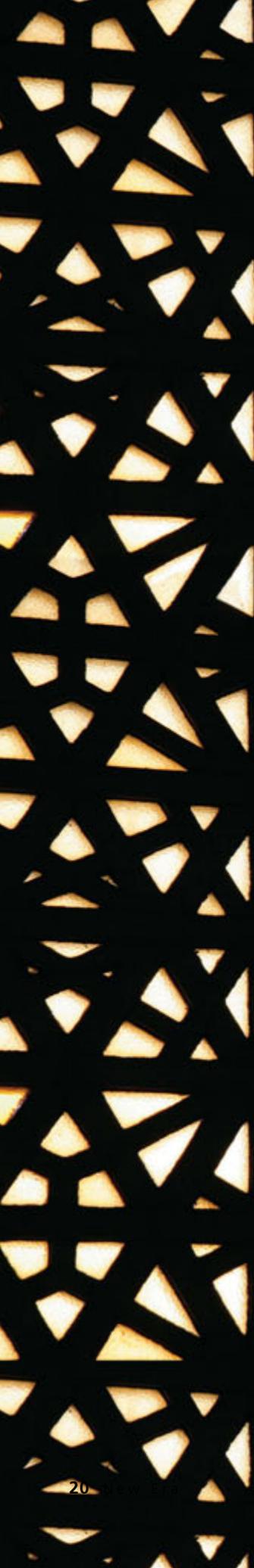
“I’m grateful to know the Church is true, and I am grateful for the guidance that it gives me every day,” says Travis Alexander, 17.

“I’m grateful for programs like seminary. Every morning I have the opportunity to go and study the scriptures, and this helps me to make good choices in my life. I know that Joseph Smith was a true prophet who restored this gospel to us in the latter days, and I’m so grateful for it. Each and every day I thank Heavenly Father for the works that Joseph did. I’m also grateful for my family and how they guide me and bless me and for their continuous love. I’m grateful for a brother who is serving a mission and is a good example for me.”

Vuyo Dasha, 18, says, “I’m thankful to know that Heavenly Father lives. I know He loves us so much that He sent His son to die for us. And I am grateful beyond measure that Jesus Christ sacrificed His life so that through repentance and through His Atonement we may be able to live with our Heavenly Father again.”

Why not make a list of your own blessings? You can keep it in your journal, or start a new Christmas tradition by sharing a list with others and encouraging them to make lists of their own.





Amy recalls, “There was one song that I started to listen to. It was like I couldn’t stop listening, I loved the melody so much. But I found out there was a hidden meaning to it and that the song was degrading me. I didn’t feel like a daughter of God. So I stopped listening to that song, and I was able to feel the Spirit again and follow its promptings. I contrast that with a song like a Christmas hymn. I always feel uplifted after I’ve listened to a spiritual song, something that is virtuous, lovely, and praiseworthy.”

Travis makes a promise. “I know that if you listen to good music, you will be blessed. You will feel guidance in your life. You will feel the Spirit. And isn’t that what we’re truly here for, to feel the Spirit and be closer to our Heavenly Father?” That’s the kind of attitude we ought to have at Christmas. It’s the kind of attitude we should have all year long.

A Promise Worth Pursuing

Yes, music helps all Latter-day Saints to worship our Heavenly Father, celebrate the Savior’s life, and feel the Holy Spirit. Back

in Soweto, it is Zintle who perhaps sums it up best. In her seminary class she is asked if there is a hymn that would describe the future of the Church in South Africa. She thinks for just a moment, then quickly responds, “Hymn number 3, ‘Now Let Us Rejoice.’ It tells us that the Lord is aware of us, that our struggles will be worth it, and that if we remain faithful we will be crowned with the angels of heaven.” That’s a promise worth pursuing at Christmas or at any other season of the year. **NE**

Seminary in Soweto (above) gives Latter-day Saint students another reason to rejoice, and Amy Vermeulen (inset) says hymns embody that which is virtuous, lovely, of good report, and praiseworthy.



HYMNS TO REMEMBER

Of course, any hymn that praises the Lord is appropriate to sing all through the year. Here are verses that are not normally associated with Christmas but that praise the Lord just the same. See if you can name which hymn they are from. There's a key at the bottom to help you.

1. Join in the theme and sing
With harmony unceasing
The praises of our King.
2. Let us raise a joyful strain
To our Lord who soon will reign.
3. In the beauty of the lilies, Christ was born
across the sea . . .
As he died to make men holy, let us live
to make men free.
4. All creatures of our God and King,
Lift up your voice and with us sing.
5. Great King of heav'n, our hearts we raise
To thee in prayer, to thee in praise . . .
And with one voice in one glad chord,
With myriad echoes, praise the Lord.
6. Alleluia, Alleluia,
Bright and clear our voices ring,
Singing songs of exultation



- To our Maker, Lord, and King!
7. Thou art the King of Israel,
Thou David's royal Son,
Who in the Lord's name comest,
The King and Blessed One.
 8. Be joyful in the Lord, my heart! . . .
To Him all praise and glory!
 9. Then come before God's presence!
With singing worship him!
Express the heart too full to speak
In one exultant hymn.
 10. Exalt his name in loud acclaim;
His mighty pow'r adore!
And humbly bow before him now,
Our King forevermore.
 11. To praise him let us all engage,
For unto us is giv'n
To live in this momentous age
And share the light of heav'n.
 12. Let the Redeemer's name be sung
Through ev'ry land, by ev'ry tongue . . .
The great salvation loud proclaim,
And shout for joy the Savior's name.

13. Praise him for his mercy;
Praise him for his love.
For unnumbered blessings
Praise the Lord above.
14. And each one try, with single eye,
To praise the Savior best.
15. 'Tis sweet to sing the matchless love
Of Him who left his home above
And came to earth—oh, wondrous plan—
To suffer, bleed, and die for man!
16. Come, O thou King of Kings!
We've waited long for thee,
With healing in thy wings
To set thy people free.

KEY

1. "Come, All Ye Saints of Zion," no. 38
2. "Come, Ye Children of the Lord," no. 58
3. "Battle Hymn of the Republic," no. 60
4. "All Creatures of Our God and King," no. 62
5. "Great King of Heaven," no. 63
6. "On This Day of Joy and Gladness," no. 64
7. "All Glory, Laud, and Honor," no. 69
8. "Sing Praise to Him," no. 70
9. "With Songs of Praise," no. 71
10. "In Hymns of Praise," no. 75
11. "Great is the Lord," no. 77
12. "From All That Dwell below the Skies," no. 90
13. "Sing We Now at Parting," no. 156
14. "Come, Let Us Sing an Evening Hymn," no. 167
15. "'Tis Sweet to Sing the Matchless Love," nos. 176 and 177
16. "Come, O Thou King of Kings," no. 59

