



Alleluia
MANY VOICES + ONE SONG

Music and Cross Cultural Engagement

Randall Bradley,
Baylor University

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This session will explore cross-cultural engagement involving music. Best practices and philosophical underpinnings will be presented. Based on the presenter's taking groups to Africa, Asia, South America, and Europe, emphasis will be given to international travel experiences, networking, choosing appropriate songs, and more.

How does music function as cross-cultural engagement?

- We all know that it does, but how?
- Music is present in every culture and utilized in every major life event.
- Ability to influence both the head and the heart.
- Breaks down barriers – we usually trust people who are vulnerable enough to sing.
- Builds bridges – something we know in common – music steps in when language fails.
- Moves us from the periphery to the center – music draws us in.
- Involves the full body – physical commitment is inherent in singing/playing.
- The communal aspect of music making sends the message that all are welcome.
- Requires commitment to the others with whom we collaborate (communal).
- An effective means of hospitality (see chapters in my book “Embracing Hospitality,” “The Call to Be Missional,” “Community and the Church’s Music,” and “Becoming Multi-Musical”).
- Empowers and equalizes.

How did we come to see “missions” as a not-so-effective term?

- The failure of the missions movement to share the gospel without also exporting its cultural trappings.
- Failure to offer imaginative ways for the gospel to enculturate into contexts that are non-western.
- What terms are better?
- A sharing of cultures and God stories in which our God view is enhanced.
- Saving others vs. recognizing our common brokenness.

Missions travel or mission vacation?

- Often controversial and has been often questioned.
- Voluntourism
- Poverty vacation
- Always return to every missions site multiple times – avoid one-time visits.
- Build solid relationships/connections/partnerships.

Some practical insights

- Local contacts are the key to an effective trip.
- Long range planning is a must – 18-24 months for a trip to a new location.
- A preliminary visit is worth the expense.

- Utilize a team in planning.
- Consult with seasoned travelers for best practices.
- Be sure the location and activities are a good fit for the group.

Choosing Music

- To be most cross culturally engaging, choose music that is flexible and portable – consider unaccompanied songs and portable instruments.
- Don't expect traditional instruments in developing countries – pianos, organs, or even electric outlets.
- Choral/vocal music should be primarily homophonic.
- Smaller instruments are desired.
- Consider costs of traveling with instruments – fees and space.
- Utilize instruments from the culture.
- Recorded accompaniments are discouraged.
- Plan for minimal set-up to allow for impromptu music making.
- Memory is strongly encouraged.
- Consider maintaining an inventory of older or less valuable instruments for travel.

Utilizing the Music of the Host Culture

- Nothing communicates more than valuing someone's music.
- Sing/present music of the culture even if the music is not presented with the nuance you would prefer/desire.
- You can tweak language and idiosyncratic stylistic issues with the help of in-country hosts.
- Get help with hard-to-learn languages.
- Arrange pieces to meet your team's specific capabilities (choose toward the team).
- Sing by memory.
- Choose a variety of music that represents your culture and theirs.
- Ultimately, quality will speak louder than style.
- Avoid slower pieces in most cross-cultural contexts.

Building a Team

- Start with a core group and build outward.
- Visit personally with those you want to be on the core team.
- Without a strong core, reconsider the trip.
- Once team is solidified, reconsider music again.

Financing

- Many trips fail to meet their goals due to failure of initial funding.
- Failure to have appropriate funding and support affects the team you will be able to recruit.
- Trip planners often consume much of the cost of an international trip – consider being your own travel agent.

- Careful budgeting is a must – consult experienced travelers, and plan for the unexpected.
- Local hosts strongly affect the ultimate trip costs.
- Different cultures had different financial expectations.
- Consider lower level hotels that are clean and comfortable but not posh.
- Safety is paramount and must not be compromised.
- Know people who know people.

Creating an Itinerary and Best Practices

- Balance fun, work, and reflection – each is important.
- Alternate difficult days with lighter days.
- Allow for returning to safe lodging each day.
- Plan for culture shock.
- Plan very specifically and then be flexible.
- Generally plan fewer activities than you think are needed.
- The itinerary should reflect the age and maturity of the group.
- Do not neglect for shopping, sight seeing, and enjoying the host culture. Your hosts will take joy in your enjoyment of their country.
- Allow for ample time for reflection and processing.
- Every lodging change requires time to reestablish a sense of surrounding and trust.
- Build in time for currency exchange, visits to ATM, etc.
- Understand the traffic challenges of the host culture.
- Having a health care professional as a part of the team is helpful.
- Traveling in one large vehicle is far more desirable than in several smaller ones – worth the extra cost.
- Consider packing food for lunches (saves money and time).
- Always travel with a local host.
- Trust the locals.
- Expect minor illnesses.
- As much as possible eat as the locals eat – avoid American food.
- Plan a schedule for payments that breaks down the total into manageable units.
- Everyone should pay something – my rule is \$500. Paying less encourages people to drop out at the last minute.
- Consider building in time for affirmations.
- Effectively utilize long period of bus travel – affirmations, reflections, singing rounds.