

GLIMPSE

A Happy Tune

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"Row, row, row your boat gently down the stream." This is the opening line of a little ditty which forms what is called a "Round". I assume we all learned how to sing more loudly than any others who were involved in this singing-go-round. The notes of the Round are set so there is some kind of harmony, but I was in the Blue-Bird group in my first-grade class and harmony was always an unachieved hope.

It does sound wonderful when this Blue-Bird graduate sings the standard main melody while others sing someway to give me the feeling I am actually in a choir. At least we are singing the same words, most of the time. When I was studying Theology in Toronto, I was invited often to the house of a family whom I met and there we enjoyed a four-guitar musical treat. I can play the four-chord progression, C, A-minor, F, and G-seventh. This may not mean anything to some and others are smiling at how un-anything I am guitar-wise. Well we would tune up the strings and decide the tempo and sing, each, his or her own song using the same chords. Why? Most folk and liturgical and popular songs of that time were all using that same progression. It was fun, because each of us could switch into different songs, never missing a strum, but it was not harmony!

I have tried to sing one song to myself while listening to a second song on a CD or on the radio. It is very difficult to stick to my song, maybe because the others sound better. You should try it some time. It seems that what we listen to outside tends to dominate what's being sung inside.

My room sits two unobstructed blocks from the interstate and the hum is constant, low, and insistent. I hear it even when I am not listening. There is a hum moving into a melody, moving into a chorus around us singing various tunes which are radiating even when we are not listening. Each of us has a basic song of life's meaning. We sing it, because it sounds good, feels good deep inside. It is our melody and our actions are the words.

Within our experiences of life, our interactions, there are not harmonies or rounds, but catch-your-ear songs whose verses and chords are a counter-point to our singing. Like the other members of the Blue-birds, the counter-pointers voices can easily drown our personal tunes. The basic themes of our interior music are of gratitude, self-acceptance, and generosity. The songs coming toward us, challenging our little ditties, speak of comparing, not-enough, competition and achieving of identities. My interior can be so attracted to a societal-song that I can make it my own without reflecting that it really isn't mine and is causing me disharmony inside and out.

I think this is where discernment or reflection or prayer play their gentle strums. What am I listening to? It is so difficult to sing our personal song at the same time being seduced by so many other attractive and loudly insistent unharmonious songs. I have to sit down and listen to the beat, tempo, melody and especially the words of my own song to make sure it is mine and not coming from the fast-paced interstate-hums around me. It is only a glimpse, tra-la-la.