

Musical Son (2013)

Houston Hodges, for Writer's Corner, WLRH Radio Huntsville, AL USA

I have a son who's musical, and sings around here and there, including the chorus of the Philadelphia Opera, plus some church-gigs. He decided to try something new, when he was visiting us: he'd sing an extemporaneous response to the scripture at our church, right after it was read, the same way a preacher delivers a response in words, in what's called a sermon. So he did that when he was here... and it was riveting.

I had asked our pastor for the scriptures she was going to preach from a couple of weeks before; she provided them, and I sent them to Chris. He mused and reflected and fiddled with them, but not too much — he wanted it to be fresh, and original, and unique. The Sunday came, the Bible-parts were read, then Chris stood up to sing. A pause, a deep breath, and here it came: deep, mellow, thoughtful, reverent... without accompaniment, but to rapt attention, without a sound from the flock. Absolutely great, and I'd never heard anything like that before.

Oh, it could be done differently; a sculptor could take a lump of clay and mold a response to the Sermon on the Mount, or a dancer could dance the Shepherd Psalm, or a painter could sketch a reaction to Ruth and Boaz out in the grain-field ... but this time it was really great, and had never been heard before. Alas, it will never be heard again, either. But that's the name of that tune.

May it continue, as artists respond to great texts of humankind, as they hear and remember and reflect on magnificent words with their own unique reactions to that greatness.