

## The Making of "Worship in Song"

by Joan Broadfield

Thank you, Friends and Friends General Conference, for allowing us to produce the new Friends hymnal, *Worship in Song*. Not only was it an important resource for Friends, it was an affirmation for those of us whose spiritual lives are fed by music.

It was also, for those of us active in the selection process, a real spiritual journey, rich with experiences of discovering and rediscovering the spirit in song and of building a small community of worship together. Our hope is that the process we have been through can be captured for others attempting the same type of work.

Fears that powerful faith would not be reflected, fears about language, fears of exclusion and inclusion, fears that treasured hymns would not be treated with respect—these were the fears that had made a hymnal impossible ten years before. We decided to keep our fears (written on 3x5 cards) in front of us, posted on an easel, while we continued to sing, listen, and share.

It took about ten years from the time FGC decided to encourage a group of Friends to explore what a new Friends hymnal would look like until the first hymnal appeared. This initial process produced a weekend conference, to which Friends came bringing the visions for a hymnal of small groups all over FGC. We were lucky to have the presence of one member of the last hymnal committee, the late Walter Felton, who shared a sense of perspective as well as a knowledge of music and hymnody.

Friends also brought their fears--fears about such diversity that powerful faith would not be reflected, fears about language, fears of exclusion and inclusion, fears that treasured hymns would not be treated with respect. These were the fears that, as many remembered, had made a hymnal impossible ten years before. We decided to keep our fears (written on 3x5 cards) in front of us, posted on an easel, while we continued to sing, listen, and share. In the end, we agreed that we needed to try to create a new Friends hymnal.

Out of this weekend came a folder of music, and guidance for the small group in Philadelphia (the Oversight Committee) which proceeded to put together guiding principles and to name a Music Selection Working Group: Musewogs!

Beginning about 1991, Meetings for Selection were held two or three times a year. We met around tables piled high with hymnals and sheets of music. Over the years the group reviewed over 1000 submissions, not including some which had been previously culled because it was clear that they did not meet guidelines of singability, language, or theology.

Our process of review consisted of singing, sharing feelings and information, then discerning whether each piece was a clear keep or discard, or if it needed to be put in a growing "wait and see" pile. A sheet on which we were to record key points did help us, but our recording discipline often got lost in the shuffle of listening to the music and the sharing.

Two years ago we further developed our process by asking each member to pick ca. 100 selections "that need to be in the hymnal." In the end we arrived at about 250 hymns by including all those picked by at least six of the fourteen people. Some of those that appeared had been previous discards. We met to review those selections, did some fine-tuning, then trusted the Oversight Committee to consider what else to include, aiming for 300 to 500 hymns. The Oversight Committee carefully reviewed the content of the hymnal so far and looked for areas not adequately represented. It also considered what areas might be over-represented. Members held the process and each other in the Light throughout.

As the Selection Committee was ending its part in the process, the Oversight Committee began to focus on the arrangement of the hymnal, using ideas by two members of Musewogs to develop the current outline. (A breakthrough was considering "Fruits of worship".) This outline was then used to review the hymnal and assure a good balance.

It fit together in an amazing way, and is a great testimony to the grace of the Spirit.

And to the goodness of staff and organization.

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COUNTERPOINT by Esther Mürer

## Art and Quaker Process

In this issue we have two pieces focusing on art as Quaker group process. Roger Aldridge writes of collaborative art activities in Sandy Spring Meeting, and [Joan Broadfield](#) describes the process of putting together the new FGC hymnal.

I was involved with the hymnal in its early stages, when we were trying to think why unprogrammed Friends need a hymnal and what would make it distinctively Quaker. Concluding that it would be as Quakerly as the process which produced it, we spent much of our time devising a framework in which Quaker process could operate. Joan, who was involved from beginning to end, tells what happened after that.

Art abounds in Quakerdom. Our social and educational gatherings commonly include cooperative games, collaborative pictures, role playing, journal writing, zen walks, singing....

When I was new to Friends I sang in a choir at the FGC Gathering. I had belonged to a Unitarian church choir, and was struck by how in a few days the Quaker group developed a sense of ensemble which it had taken the Unitarian choir years to achieve.

Then there was a Pentecost at Pendle Hill in which our singing turned into a glossolalia with joyous, abandoned improvising of harmony and then abruptly gave way to ten minutes of deep silence. And an astonishing "meeting for reading aloud" in which no one knew what anyone else had brought; we read out of the silence as led, and miraculously each piece pointed to the next, and the whole was much greater than the sum of its parts.

Here is a favorite axiom of mine: A religion is as vital as the art it generates. Our art is a mirror of our corporate spiritual state.

If this is so, then it is hardly surprising that the art which comes most naturally to Friends is cooperative, Spirit-led, and evanescent. It makes no distinction between amateur and professional. It is an art of process, not product.

The paradigm, the quintessential Quaker art form which gives rise to all the rest, is our meeting for worship. The primary aesthetic quality involved is *gatheredness*—and the deep sense of unity and richness which it brings.

This is a truth which I have known, and resisted, for years. The point of resistance is: Where does it leave the artist who has invested much in mastering a craft, whose work is often largely solitary, requiring lengthy gestation?

This question isn't going to go away. I hereby write it on a metaphorical 3x5 card and post it on Joan Broadfield's easel of fears. Many of us have fears like that. But they shouldn't keep us from celebrating the ways in which our tradition (whatever our ancestors may have thought) is inherently art-friendly. Those ways are manifold and rich.

Many artists today are seeking ways to escape the trap of consumerism, to keep their art from being turned into commodities. Surely the unprogrammed meeting for worship is one of the least commodifiable art forms on earth. There's the old joke about marketing a series of blank tapes inviting the listener to "Worship along with [Rufus Jones, Douglas Steere, etc.]"

Might we have a word of healing and celebration to speak to artists outside Quakerdom, as well as to non-artists within? A word coming out of our tradition—of worship, group process, facing the Shadow and minding the Light together?

Veni Creator Spiritus.

**To what extent is your art solitary? To what extent do you do art with others?**

**What are the tensions between the two?**

**What fears do they give rise to? How might Friends help?**

**What possibilities for outreach do you see in the intersection of art with Quaker process?**

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