
The Music of Love Unseen

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by the Rev. Dr. Bill Harkins**

“So we do not lose heart. ...for this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.” 2 Corinthians

Among my favorite pieces of music is John Coltrane’s iconic composition “A Love Supreme,” recorded in December of 1964. Coltrane’s gift to us was a declaration that his musical devotion was now intertwined with his faith in God, a spiritual quest that grew out of his personal troubles. “I experienced, by the grace of God, a spiritual awakening... leading me to a richer, fuller, more productive life.” McCoy Tyner, who played piano on the recording, said “It was just such a wonderful experience....we couldn't really explain why it was... meant to be.”

Music evokes the mystery of Paul’s call to “see what cannot be seen” in ways that move us to deeper understanding, as in this favorite hymn:

*My song is love unknown
My Savior’s love to me
Love to the loveless shown
That they might lovely be. O who am I
That for my sake
My Lord should take
Frail flesh, and die? ¹*

Recently, I was with my family in northern New Mexico and visited the Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi, in Santa Fe, site of Willa Cather’s novel *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. Among my favorite passages in the novel Archbishop Latour, the main character, says:

“Where there is great love there are always miracles...human vision corrected by divine love. I do not see you as you really are... I see you through my affection for you. The Miracles of the Church seem to me to rest ...upon our perceptions being made finer, so that for a moment our eyes can see and our ears can hear what is there about us always.”

I once watched a glorious parade on the Plaza of St. Francis Cathedral. The morning was filled with music; Spanish violin groups, Mariachi bands representing societies paying homage to saints, and music from the Pueblos found in the region—so much wonderful music!

As the participants entered the Cathedral, I found myself moved by the richness of God’s creation. I was also acutely aware that I was very much in the minority. I was the “Anglo” stranger, standing on the periphery as the parade passed me by.

Then a Mariachi band of old Hispanic men, with deep, leathery skin the reddish brown color of the very earth in the surrounding hills came into view. As they passed by me, one of them paused, and bowed, still playing his violin. Nodding, he motioned me to enter the procession. His deep brown eyes were smiling, and in a moment of joyful, grace-filled

transcendence, I found myself a part of this glorious dance, healed, and moving up the stairs into the deep, delightful, sacred mystery of the Cathedral. Music accompanied me on this journey, and was reminiscent of the final verse of “Love Unknown”:

*Here might I stay and sing
No story so divine;
Never was love, dear King,
Never was grief like Thine.
This is my Friend
In whose sweet praise
I all my days
Could gladly spend.*

Paul reminds us that death does not rule, not only when we die, but also while we live. As Cather’s Archbishop says, miracles of grace are all around us, if we will open our eyes and ears to see and hear. John Coltrane understood this as a “Love Supreme.” So do I. And that morning in Santa Fe, love unknown and unseen was made “manifest.”² May we, too, join in the Holy procession—the grace-filled resurrection parade into Pentecost, with gratitude. May our eyes see and our ears hear the music of love supreme, unknown and unseen, and may we not lose heart.

1. “My Song is Love Unknown,” Samuel Crossman and John Ireland, 1982 Hymnal, p. 458

2. “Songs of Thankfulness and Praise,” Wadsworth, Tucker, Hintze, Bach, 1982 Hymnal, p. 135.