

BOOK REVIEW

"M A N Y   A N D   G R E A T"

[Songs of the World Church : Volume I]

edited and arranged by John L Bell

designed by Graham Maule

WILD GOOSE PUBLICATIONS, Iona Community, Glasgow

(Book £5.95 : Cassette £6.95)

This splendid little book is sub-titled "Songs of the World Church", and its 25 items come from all corners of the globe - Argentina, the Caribbean, Czechoslovakia, Nepal, South Africa and the USSR - to name but a few ! Its vigorous selection of hymns, songs and liturgical material is an exciting example of the old proverb, "Guid gear gangs into sma buik".

The music is simple, the rhythms are striking and although the native language is sometimes tricky, it is always manageable. A companion cassette, with its ability to inspire the willing and console the anxious, takes us skillfully through all the piecwees with energetic enthusiasm and with notable clarity of diction.

The singing throughout is meant to be unaccompanied, in unison, two, three or four parts. It is all capable of being sung and enjoyed by a congregation as well as by groups or by a choir. Some of the items would require practice, but many could be sung from scratch. All without exception are interesting, stimulating and worthwhile.

The book may be small but it contains many treasures - the haunting American Indian melody "Many and Great"; the strong pulsing "Kyrie" from Ghana; the beautiful Czechoslovakian air "May God draw near" laid over fine modern harmony; the hip-swinging "Halle halle halle-lujah" from the Caribbean; the fine new setting of the Malawian "Let the World in Concert Sing".

About half of the songs are in English; the rest are in the original languages with English translations (interchangeable in some cases). The original texts are all authentic; the translations use idioms and images appropriate to the original sense. The music throughout is as accurate as oral translation allows. Each item carries a note as to background, source, context and degree of authenticity.

These items could be used at many points in a service; as hymns; as acclamations; to accompany prayer; for processions; as responses. Many lend themselves to repetition and could be used as focal points in worship.

The book is well produced in what might be called the "house style" of Wild Goose Publications. It is comfortable to use, easy to read and a pleasure to handle. It should be used, however, only by those who are willing to be stirred and changed, who are ready to acknowledge the worth of songs from other cultures, and who have the courage to risk engaging in the dynamic of a new spiritual adventure.

Alison and Charlie Robertson

(Manse of the Canongate Kirk, Edinburgh)

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