

The Unsung Hymnal
The UU Church of Vancouver
August 31, 2025

Reflection on the Theme by Emily Layfield

One of the things I find the most fascinating about music is how direct of a line there seems to be from music to emotion. Movie sound tracks for example have an outsized impact on me, and there are lots of movies I won't go see in the theater because the anxiety drone that seems so trendy lately is too unsettling. When I was in grad school, one of the things I was investigating was that kind of phenomenon - how non-narrative elements of performance can be a shortcut to evoking emotional experiences, and sound and music are a great pathway.

What I found just as fascinating, though, is how individual emotional responses to music can be. We often share cultural touchstones, but the same song can be comforting to one person and unsettling to another, largely because of the unique experiences and associations each of us brings to it. And the more experiences we have with a piece of music, the stronger those associations can get.

At the same time, music doesn't only work on the level of memory and emotion. It also works physiologically, especially in groups. Studies show that when people sing together, their breathing and even their heart rates can sync up. Rhythms can literally entrain our bodies to one another, and singing or listening together can trigger bonding hormones like oxytocin. So music doesn't just feel like connection—it actually helps create it in our bodies.

So between how emotional music can be and how it can physiologically connect us, I absolutely appreciate why music is such an integral part of worship experiences. And yet, as a relatively new UU, many of the songs we sing, which tend to be fairly simple and singable but often unfamiliar, might not stir my feelings right away. What I realized, though, is that I'm not only synching up physically with all of you when we sing together, but I'm also now creating the emotional associations our music has for me. This, us here together and how that feels when we sing, is shaping what these songs are going to mean to me and what they will do to my feelings whenever I hear them or sing them into the future. Now with a new hymnal and as we get to know these songs, we all have the chance to build some new associations together.

Sermon by Allison King

Hymns from Sing Out Love:

This Boat This song was inspired by the work of Victor Frankl on happiness versus meaning in our lives. When we commit to a community of any kind, our fates and fortunes rise and fall

together.

composer Laura Zucker (she/her) is a singer/songwriter, vocalist and multi-instrumentalist, music educator, coach, and author. She is a member of the HouseBand at Mt. Diablo UU Church in Walnut Creek, CA.

Rooted in Fertile Ground “Rooted in Fertile Ground” was commissioned by a UU congregation in celebration of their acquiring their first building. I used some of their nature-inspired imagery but wrote a worship song broad enough for use in a variety of settings. The song is much enhanced if the echo phrases are included.

Amanda Udis-Kessler (she/her) is a hymnwriter, songwriter, and sacred music composer. Amanda delights in expanding joy and working against suffering. She is the accompanist and composer in residence at Vista Grande Community Church UCC in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

We Will Carry Each Other “We Will Carry Each Other” features a short, easy-to-learn chorus with a soaring melody and powerful message of solidarity and hope. The lyrics draw inspiration from Soren Austenfeld’s conversations with UU colleagues and friends.

Soren Austenfeld is a singer, voice educator, music director, and composer. He is currently the Music Director at First Parish in Malden, Universalist in the Boston, MA area.

If There Aint Room “If There Ain’t Room (Room for Me and You)” is a song about including everyone in Beloved Community.

“as I worked on the song, I started to think about all the people in my life and whether they would be welcomed—just as they are—in the many places I go. Would my brother, a 6’1” tall Black man with dark skin and a very muscular body, be welcome to speak the truth of his life? Would he be treated with inherent worth and dignity or be patronized and tolerated? Would my friends who love each other be welcomed? Would women, artists, scholars, and so many more be welcomed to speak, to live, to enact policies and movements to organize their lives for their own benefit?”

Pass On the Light “Pass on the Light” was written for the 50th anniversary of River Road Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Bethesda, MD, where Clif Hardin has served as Music Director for 42 years. The lyricist, Jan Elicker, is Clif’s spouse, and they have collaborated for many anthems, hymns, and larger choral compositions.

Joy In the Morning “Joy in the Morning” is an original gospel-style hymn, with influences from folk, gospel, and spirituals. This is just one of many songs that make reference to the text in Psalm 30:5 which states, “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.”

Composer Adam Podd is a Vermont-bred, Brooklyn-based music director, pianist, organist, bassist, composer and arranger. He is currently Music Director and choir director at First Unitarian Church in Brooklyn, NY. Adam has worked with some of the top artists and

organizations in his field including National Symphony Orchestra, Boston Pops, Cynthia Erivo, Ingrid Michaelson, Idina Menzel, the Young People's Chorus of New York City, and others in such venues as Carnegie Hall, The Kennedy Center, and others.