

**Solomon and Sinatra: The Song of Songs and Romance in the Church**  
**Robert Case**  
**A Sunday School Class**  
**Faith Presbyterian Church**  
**Tacoma, Washington**  
**2016**

**Part 3**

There are a multitude of biblical themes expressed by non-believing Jewish songwriters in the American Songbook, but one fine example for our purposes in this class is the theme of:

- no Sex before marriage

**“Love and Marriage”**

In 1955 Jimmy Van Heusen (a Methodist) with Jewish lyricist Sammy Cahn wrote “Love and Marriage” which was introduced (ironically) by Frank Sinatra in the television production of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*. It is the biggest hit to ever come out of a television special. In 1956, the song, "Love and Marriage" won the Emmy Award for Best Musical Contribution from the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. The Cahn inspired clever lyrics euphemistically call “sex” “love” and claim that mom told dad you can't have sex (“love”) without marriage. The song was used as the theme song for the long-running (1987–97) FOX television sitcom *Married... with Children*. Additionally, the song has been used in several national commercial campaigns.

“Love and marriage, love and marriage, go together like a horse and carriage. This I tell you brother you can't have one without the other. Love and marriage, love and marriage, it's an institute you can't disparage. Ask the local gentry and they will say it's elementary. Try, try, try to separate them it's an illusion Try, try, try, and you will only come to this conclusion. Love and marriage, love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage. Dad was told by mother, you can't have one, you can't have none you can't have one without the other.

(Love and Marriage” performed by Frank Sinatra)(2:38)

[https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00UEG8566/ref=dm\\_ws\\_tlw\\_trk5](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00UEG8566/ref=dm_ws_tlw_trk5)

Can you image a popular song being written like this now?

Despite theological rebellion, God gave success to the “natural descendants” or “branches” (*klados*) (Romans 11:21, 24; Galatians 2:15) of the Old Testament Church so that not only their houses but the world's houses “can be filled with good things” as Job says in Job 22:18. David tells us in Psalm 36:7-8 that “the children of mankind. . . feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights.”

The forte of Old Testament Church creative spirit lies not in the rational or plastic arts of

sculpture and architecture, but in the emotional arts of poetry and music. This was part of God's plan of redemption for His Church – do not create magnificent graven images (cf, Exodus 20:4; 2 Kings 17:16) but do create magnificent music and poetry. We know God enabled this from the lives of David and Elisha (2 Kings 3:15). And from the fact that God the Father expressed His love for His Church in song:

Zephaniah 3:17

“The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.”

The Old Testament Church believed that God, Himself, was in music, as Moses said in Exodus 15: “The LORD is my strength and my song,” and young Elihu is recorded as saying in Job 35:10, “God my Maker who gives songs (*zemir* = praise) in the night,” and the sons of Korah sang in Psalm 42:8, “God's song is with me.” Interesting in connection with the idea of music belonging to the triune God, is the musical ministry of Jesus spoken of in Hebrews 2:12,

“So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says, ‘I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing (*humneo*) your praises’” (cf, *Odes of Solomon*, 31, “[Our Lord] opened his mouth and spoke a new song of praise to His name.”).

### “I Write the Songs”

"I Write the Songs" is a song written by Bruce Johnston of the Beach Boys in 1975 and made famous by Barry Manilow. The song reached #1 on the *Billboard* chart in 1975 and 1976, won a Grammy Award for “Song of the Year” (for Johnston) and was nominated for a Grammy “Record of the Year” (for Manilow) in 1977. Composer/lyricist Johnston stated that the "I" and “My” in the song is "God" and that songs come from the spirit of creativity (Fred Bronson, *Billboard Book of #1 Hits*, 2003). Mr. Manilow was initially reluctant to record the song, stating in his autobiography, *Sweet Life*:

"The problem with the song was that if you didn't listen carefully to the lyric, you would think that the singer was singing about himself. It could be misinterpreted as a monumental ego trip."

Here is the ode to the way we should look at the music of the American Songbook as Barry Manilow sings of divine musical creativity:

“I’ve been alive forever and I wrote the very first song. I put the words and the melodies together, I am music, and I write the songs. I write the songs that make the whole world sing. I write the songs of love and special things. I write the songs that make the young girls cry. I write the songs, I write the songs. My home lies deep within you, and I’ve got my own place in your soul. Now, when I look out through your eyes, I’m young again, even though I’m very old. Oh my music makes you dance and gives you spirit to take a chance, and I wrote some rock ‘n’ roll so you can move. Music fills your heart,

Well, that's a real fine place to start. It's from me it's for you, It's from you, it's from me, It's a worldwide symphony. I am music, and I write the songs."

("I Write the Songs" performed by Barry Manilow)(3:50) <https://www.amazon.com/I-Write-the-Songs/dp/B00137MLDS>

### **"The Song is You"**

"The Song Is You" is a Broadway show tune composed by Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II. It was written for their 1932 musical *Music in the Air*. In later years the song became often associated with Frank Sinatra. "The Song Is You" is the recurring musical theme of the 2003 film, *The Saddest Music in the World*. During which 9 different versions of the song were arranged for the film by composer Christopher Dedrick, who received a Genie Award, which is basically the Canadian Academy Awards.

"I hear music when I look at you A beautiful theme of every dream I ever knew Down deep in my heart, I hear it play I feel it start then melt away. I hear music when I touch your hand A beautiful melody from some enchanted land Down deep in my heart, I hear it say Is this the day? I alone have heard this lovely strain I alone have heard this glad refrain Must it be forever in side of me. Why can't I let it go? Why can't I let you know? Why can't I let you know The song my heart would sing?"

("The Song is You" performed by Frank Sinatra)(3:16) [https://www.amazon.com/The-Song-Is-You/dp/B003MGRHAA/ref=sr\\_1\\_4?s=dmusic&ie=UTF8&qid=1470426338&sr=1-4&keywords=The+Song+Is+You+Frank+Sinatra](https://www.amazon.com/The-Song-Is-You/dp/B003MGRHAA/ref=sr_1_4?s=dmusic&ie=UTF8&qid=1470426338&sr=1-4&keywords=The+Song+Is+You+Frank+Sinatra)

### **"This is My Song"**

"This Is My Song" is a song written by Charlie Chaplin in 1966 intended for his film, *A Countess from Hong Kong*. Chaplin saw his film as a throwback to the shipboard romances of the 1930s and wrote "This Is My Song" with the intent of evoking that era. To evoke that era, Chaplin was determined to have Al Jolson sing the song, but Jolson had died 16 years earlier. Chaplin was so determined to have the great Jolson sing his song that Chaplin only accepted the information that Jolson had died after he was shown a photograph of Jolson's tombstone. After being disillusioned with regard to Jolson, Chaplin considered having "This Is My Song" recorded by Petula Clark who had a home in Switzerland near his residence. Clark's husband/manager liked the song, however, Clark's regular collaborator Tony Hatch was not impressed, and refused to arrange it for Clark to record. Ultimately, with the help of other people, Clark recorded the song. But she did not want to record the song in English because she disliked the old-fashioned, 1930s lyrics, which Chaplin refused to modify. Eventually, she did have an English language recording session which featured the backing of the great studio musician group known as the "Wrecking Crew." Despite not liking the song or her recording of it, Ms. Clark found herself atop the UK Singles Chart for the first time in 6 years when "This Is My Song" reached the charts in 1967/ Eventually, UK sales alone would exceed 500,000 and the song became an international hit.

“Why is my heart so light Why are the stars so bright Why is the sky so blue Since the hour I met you. Flowers are smiling bright Smiling for our delight Smiling so tenderly For the world, you and me. I know why the world is smiling Smiling so tenderly It hears the same old story Through all eternity. Love, this is my song Here is a song, a serenade to you The world cannot be wrong If in this world there's you. I care not what the world may say Without your love there is no day So Love, this is my song Here is a song, a serenade to you. I care not what the world may say Without your love there is no day So Love, this is my song Here is a song, a serenade to you.”

(“This Is My Song” performed by Petula Clark)(3:29) [https://www.amazon.com/This-Song-Original-Soundtrack-Contessa/dp/B00B4JR37Y/ref=sr\\_1\\_3?s=dmusic&ie=UTF8&qid=1470426869&sr=1-3&keywords=This+Is+My+Song+Petula+Clark](https://www.amazon.com/This-Song-Original-Soundtrack-Contessa/dp/B00B4JR37Y/ref=sr_1_3?s=dmusic&ie=UTF8&qid=1470426869&sr=1-3&keywords=This+Is+My+Song+Petula+Clark)

### “Without a Song”

“Without a Song” is a 1929 Broadway tune by Vincent Youmans, Billy Rose and Edward Eliscu for the musical play, *Great Day*. Mr. Youmans was one of the few observant Protestants in the upper reaches of popular music composers (cf, Ralph Carmichael, Hugh Martin, Duke Ellington) and one of the major composers in the early years of the American Songbook. In this song, Jewish lyricist Eliscu creates a negro spiritual-influenced show tune referencing “woe,” “misery,” “Jordan River,” the “soul” and life without music being “no good.” One of the earliest recordings of the song is by Paul Whiteman's orchestra featuring Bing Crosby in 1929. Frank Sinatra recorded the song with the original Eliscu lyrics, including the now offensive line, “A darkie's born, but he's no good no how without a song.” In subsequent recordings, Mr. Sinatra altered text to read “a man is born, but he's no good no how without a song.” Here is Mr. Sinatra, live in Las Vegas, but with a song:

“Without a song, the day would never end. Without a song, the road would never bend. When things go wrong, man ain't got a friend, without a song. That field of corn, would never see a plow; that field of corn, would be deserted now. A man is born, he ain't no good no how without a song. I got my trouble and woe, but sure as I know the Jordan will roll. I'll get along, as long as a song is strung in my soul. I'll never know, what makes the rain to fall. I'll never know, what makes the grass so tall. I only know, there ain't no love at all, without a song.”

(“Without a Song” performed by Frank Sinatra)(4:28) [https://www.amazon.com/Without-a-Song-Live/dp/B00H9YYTZM/ref=sr\\_1\\_10?s=dmusic&ie=UTF8&qid=1470427850&sr=1-10&keywords=Without+a+Song+Frank+Sinatra](https://www.amazon.com/Without-a-Song-Live/dp/B00H9YYTZM/ref=sr_1_10?s=dmusic&ie=UTF8&qid=1470427850&sr=1-10&keywords=Without+a+Song+Frank+Sinatra)

While commercial success may be an instrumental reason for writing these perennially popular songs, it is more accurate to say that because God has “set eternity into their hearts” (Ecclesiastes 3:11; c.f., Genesis 1:26-27; Romans 2:14-15) these talented Jewish songsmiths compose these very human songs out of their conscience and creative sensitivity. One prominent Old Testament scholar - Walter Kaiser (*Ecclesiastes: Total Life*, 1979) - has argued in his commentary on Ecclesiastes that “eternity” (*olam*) in our hearts means that all men have a deep-seated desire, a compulsive drive to know the character, composition and meaning of the world and to discern its purpose and destiny.

Now, it is easy for some to miss the theological point of God's good common grace. For example, the Jewish novelist Philip Roth in his novel, *Operation Shylock* (1993) has his narrator mention Irving Berlin and his Christmas and Easter songs:

“The two holidays that celebrate the divinity of Christ – the divinity that's the very heart of the Jewish rejection of Christianity – and what does Irving Berlin brilliantly do? He de-Christens them both! Easter he turns into a fashion show (“Easter Parade”) and Christmas into a holiday about snow (“White Christmas”).”

Maybe. But I think Roth misses the providential hand of Yahweh on Mr. Berlin in all of this. To this point, concerning Christmas observance by non-Christians and biblical themes embraced by non-Bible believing composers, the English Christian G. K. Chesterton wrote,

“The great majority will go on observing forms that cannot be explained; they will keep Christmas with Christmas gifts and Christmas benedictions; they will continue to do it; and suddenly one day they will wake up and discover why.” (*On Christmas, Generally Speaking*, 1928)

The Apostle Paul, echoing Job 22, speaks of the “transgressions” of genetic Israel resulting in “riches for the world” (*ploutos kosmou*) and “the Gentiles” (*ethnos* = ‘nations’) in Romans 11:12.

“But if their transgression means riches (*ploutos*) for the world (*kosmou*), and their loss means riches for the Gentile (*ethnos*), how much more greater riches (*ploutos*) will their fullness (*pleroma*) bring.”

The Greek word translated “riches” (*ploutos*) means “wealth” or “possessions” or “fulfillment” and comes from the Greek root word (*pletho*) meaning “to fill” or “to be full” or “to be complete.” The Greek word used here for “riches” (*pletho*) is not, at root, a theological term. It is hard to spiritualize “riches” and thus limit that blessing to just soteriology for the “world” and us “Gentiles,” so I expand the “riches” to include music. One can get a sense of this “wealth” or “fullness” in 1 Corinthians 10:26, “For the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.” The Greek term for “world” (*kosmou*) clearly refers to a secular order or arrangement or adornment (1 Peter 3:3). Paul seems to be saying that the very existence of the Jewish people enriches the entire world, now preeminently through Christ even in their rebellion, and will greatly enrich the world when they come to Christ. But the Jewish enriching is more than just the offer of salvation.

A key promise of God to all genetic Jews is found three times in Genesis 17, as God speaks to Abraham:

Genesis 17:7

“I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your

descendants after you” (13, 19).

We Christians have been warned by prominent biblical theologians through the centuries (like John Calvin) not to spiritualize or allegorize this divine promise from Yahweh to the tribe of Israel, but to take the promise at face value:

\*Calvin comments on Genesis 17:7:

“There is no doubt that the Lord distinguishes the race of Abraham from the rest of the world. . . The scriptures declare that the race of Abraham, by lineal descent, had been peculiarly accepted by God. And it is the evident doctrine of Paul concerning the natural descendants of Abraham, that they are holy branches which have proceeded from a holy root (Romans 11:16). . . Paul expressly declares that Christ came to be a minister of the circumcision (Romans 15:8). Wherefore, nothing is more certain, than that God made his covenant with the sons of Abraham who were naturally to be born of him. . . And although it was by the grace of God, and not by nature, that [the Jews] excelled the Gentiles; and although the inheritance of the kingdom of God came to them by promises, and not by carnal descent; yet they are sometimes said to differ by nature from the rest of the world. For instance, in Galatians 2:15 and elsewhere, Paul calls [the Jews] ‘saints by nature’ because God was willing that his grace should descend by a continual succession to the whole [Jewish] seed. In Matthew 8:12, Christ calls the Jews ‘children of the celestial kingdom,’ even those who were unbelievers.”

\*Gerhard Von Rad calls this newly expressed covenantal promise to Abraham one of “timeless validity.” (*Genesis*, 1972)

\*Gordon Wenham comments:

“The covenant is not to be just between God and Abraham but between God and Abraham’s descendant after him. Hitherto he has been promised descendants (13:16) and the land has been promised to them (13:15), but this is the first occasion that the covenant is extended to include Abraham’s seed. This makes the covenant with Abraham like the Noahic covenant, as do the phrases ‘I shall confirm my covenant...for an eternal covenant’ (9:9; etc.). Though the land had been promised in perpetuity (13:15), this is the first time that the Abrahamic covenant has been described as ‘eternal’ or that the covenant formula ‘to be your God’ has appeared. This phrase, used twice here, expresses the heart of the covenant that God has chosen Abraham and his descendants, so that they are in a unique relationship: He is their God, and they are his people (cf, Exodus 4:16; 6:7; Lev. 11:45; 26:12, 44-45).” (*Genesis*, 1987).

\*Victor Hamilton comments,

“The repetition of the word “eternal” emphasizes that God’s covenant with Abraham has not suddenly shifted away from the unilateral emphasis of chapter

15 to a bilateral pact in chapter 17. To be sure, God has expectations concerning Abraham's behavior, but these do not become grounds of the establishment and authentication of God's covenant with Abraham. Rather, the covenant remains a personal commitment by God in which he binds himself to this open-ended promise to Abraham." (*The Book of Genesis*, 1995)

\*Kenneth Matthews comments,

"This covenant is multigenerational, even an 'everlasting' (olam) covenant for Abraham's 'generations (dorot) to come.' The verse, as with the covenant stipulations cited earlier in the chapter progresses from the person Abraham to his collective offspring. 'Seed' (zera) refers to an individual (Abraham) and as collective singular, to his posterity." (*Genesis*, 1996)

It is apparent that American Jews wrote all this great, enjoyable music because they wanted to, were capable of doing so, and because our God had uniquely gifted them to do so.

Since parts of the Biblical Songbook and all of the canon of the best American popular songs are songs of romance - fallen and thus twisted romance, but romance nonetheless - we should, therefore look to see how these two song collections are connected. To put it another way, perhaps that famous exegete of popular romance, Sinatra (who basically defined the American Songbook), can help us exegete Solomon (or the writer/editor of the *Song of Songs*), that famous exegete of sacred romance. Indeed, there are scholarly studies which examine secular love ballads from the Ancient Near East cultures which sing of young love generated, lost and found again (cf, Creation-Fall-Redemption). So maybe there was a Great Akkadian or Egyptian Songbook about the same time as the Great Hebrew Songbook, which we call the *Song of Songs* (cf, Moshe Held, "A Faithful Lover in an Old Babylonian Dialogue," 1961; J.A. Black, "Babylonian Ballads: A New Genre," 1983).

### **"I Hear a Rhapsody"**

"I Hear a Rhapsody" is a 1941 Tin Pan Alley song written by George Fragos, Jack Baker and Dick Gasparre. In 1941 it was a top 10 hit for three separate artists, Charlie Barnet, Jimmy Dorsey and Jewish songbird and Vanderbilt grad, 25 year old Dinah Shore, who every American GI fell in love with during this early war period. The song was featured in the 1952 film noir *Clash by Night* starring Barbara Stanwyck, Paul Douglas and Robert Ryan. The movie sound track featured Tony Martin and jazz notables such as pianist Gerald Wiggins, alto saxophonist Benny Carter, and tenor saxophonist Coleman Hawkins. The film involved a love triangle starring Barbara Stanwyck, Robert Ryan, and Paul Douglas. The melody is well fitted with a romantic lyric in which the mere presence of the loved one inspires heavenly music: "My darling, hold me tight and whisper to me, Then soft through the starry night I hear a rhapsody."

"When you're near, the murmuring of the breeze becomes a symphony, a rhapsody. And when I hear you call so softly to me, I don't hear a call at all, I hear a rhapsody And when your sparkling eyes are smiling at me then soft through the starlit skies, I hear a rhapsody. My days

are so blue when you're away, my heart longs for you, so won't you stay? My darling, hold me tight and whisper to me then soft through a starry night I'll hear a rhapsody.”

(“I hear a Rhapsody” performed by Dinah Shore in 1941)(2:57) [https://www.amazon.com/I-Hear-a-Rhapsody/dp/B005OXR4RA/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=dmusic&ie=UTF8&qid=1470429801&sr=1-1&keywords=I+Hear+a+Rhapsody+Dinah+Shore](https://www.amazon.com/I-Hear-a-Rhapsody/dp/B005OXR4RA/ref=sr_1_1?s=dmusic&ie=UTF8&qid=1470429801&sr=1-1&keywords=I+Hear+a+Rhapsody+Dinah+Shore)