

The Battle Belongs to HIM- A Rhetorical Analysis on the Influence of Worship Music

Marissa Jane Carr
Messiah University Department of Communication
Rhetorical Theory
Dr. Kate Oswald-Wilkins
April 24, 2024

Introduction

Music is an important part of everyone's lives. Music is very transformative, inspiring and relatable, which leaves people wanting more. The kind of music a person listens to represents much more than people think; the music people listen to is a part of their identities. It reflects who people feel they are on the inside and how people see each other the outside (Vega 366). There are many different genres of music such as pop, rap, classical, and musical theater. One of the most transformative music genres out there is worship music.

Worship music is a type of music that allows listeners to sense the presence of God (Walter and Altorfer). While someone is listening to worship music, they can take part in a religious experience. This experience is life changing, brings listeners closer to God, and evokes feelings of hope and joy (Walter and Altorfer). There are many different tones a worship song can have, from upbeat pop to slower classical. The musical scores determine how the song will make listeners feel after listening. Worship music can be a crazy, loud, pop-rock adventure that is upbeat and encouraging, and it can also be calming with release elements to help ease listeners from their earthly troubles. Worship music is so effective on its listeners because of the flexibility it has to adapt to the listeners unique situation, while giving them encouragement from the Lord. People listen to worship music in many different settings, with one of the most popular being in church. Worship music is played during church services, and it is seen as the Holy Spirit's presence throughout the service (Smith). A large part of church services is when the congregation worships together, and having an impactful worship experience is a key factor in a church attendee's decision on if they want to stay at that church or not (Vega 366).

There was a study done on the effectiveness of worship music being performed during church services, and how it impacts the Church congregation. The church that was analyzed for this study was Clear Creek M.B.C., a Baptist church in Mississippi. When the church began singing worship songs together, it felt like everyone was united as one voice, and the church community felt stronger than ever. The combination of the simple melody and joyful performance made a positive environment for worshipers, as well as giving them assurance in the power of the Word and the love of Jesus (Smith). Based on this study, it can be concluded that worship music is a powerful vessel that has the power to transform lives and unite people together. Even though this resource is a good way to show people how impactful worship music is, it does not properly delve into the specifics behind why worship music is so transformative and life changing to listeners.

As shown by evidence above, worship music is a very powerful and sacred genre of music. It has the ability to show listeners the presence of God through song, while also uniting them with other Christ followers. However, there are no clear answers to the psychology behind why worship music has such a profound effect on listeners. This rhetorical analysis will explore the genre of worship music and discover what about worship music makes it so powerful and transformative. Specifically, what the role is of the audience and the power of the divine in Christian worship music.

Artifact

There are many worship songs that relay similar messages, which mostly revolve around God always being there for you and supporting you. One song that has an amazing message and can strengthen a listener's relationship with God is "Battle Belongs" by Phil Wickham. The message of this song is that with Jesus on our side, then the battle has already been won. This song was inspired by the Bible passage 2 Chronicles 20, where a huge army is formed to fight

the people of God. The message this song shows listeners is that anything we might face, God is bigger than it, as He is always standing with us and for us. This song was written by Phil Wickham, a singer songwriter who specializes in worship music. His first album dates back to 2003 (*Give You My World*) and one of his most well known songs is "This is Amazing Grace". This song was number one on the Billboard National Christian Audience Chart for 13 weeks in 2014 (Niagara Frontier publications).

"Battle Belongs" was run through the Berean Test. This test evaluates how Biblical and accurate the song lyrics are, as well as how effective those songs are in growing relationships with God for believers and nonbelievers. The Berean Test was developed by Vince Wright, a Christ follower who wants to glorify God by sharing the Lord's love with others through his Christian music reviews (Wright). The results of the test concluded that the message communicated in the song is very encouraging with multiple spiritual guidelines included to uplift listeners and assure them that God is always with them. The lyrics align with scripture and values listed in the Bible, and it can be easily interpreted by non-believers so it will hopefully have an impact on them as well. Overall, the final score this song received on the Berean test was 9/10 (Wright). This test is a good way to evaluate the power and effectiveness of worship music, and based on these results it can be concluded that this is a very effective worship song with a powerful message.

Method Of Analysis

There are many ways that researchers analyze music with a rhetorical perspective. Researchers analyze music as rhetoric to explain the rhetorical function of music. When someone is analyzing music, they must consider the music's aesthetic and what the music communicates. Musical aesthetics are the appreciation and assessment of music. This can be achieved if somebody enjoys the music they are listening to, or if the music is appropriate for the time in which it was released or the setting it was played in. Music as communication is the meaning a listener will attach to a piece of music they listen to, specifically behind the lyrics in the piece. Music lyrics are elastic because everyone has a different meaning they place behind song lyrics based on how the listener perceives the song.

This song will be analyzed using the illusion of life perspective. This is a specific music as rhetoric perspective developed by Susanne Langer as a way to analyze how humans relate their life experiences to the music they listen to. Music is a strong representation of people's emotions; music does not cause someone to channel a certain emotion, instead it gives the listeners an outlet to feel their feelings through a relatable song. Langer named this perspective the illusion of life because she sees music as an illusion of people's emotions and feelings (Sellnow, 202). The illusion of life perspective is a very reliable way to analyze songs due to all the different aspects of music it analyzes. This perspective is one of the only music as rhetoric perspectives to analyze how lyrics and score work together to represent the feelings of listeners, as well as it makes researchers understand how music has both abstract and emotional content (Sellnow, 201).

There are many aspects in the illusion of life that are used to analyze how music functions rhetorically. The first one is by figuring out the intensity and release patterns of a song. Intensity patterns are feelings of build up and tension, and release patterns let go of all that tension to result in feelings of calmness and serenity. This is a way to figure out music as communication because these patterns can determine how a listener feels about a song, and if it makes them feel wound up or calm. These feelings can be determined by either the lyrics or the

paralanguage. The lyrics can either make somebody tense or calm them down, based on how the lyrics are interpreted and how they relate those lyrics to their life. The paralanguage of a song is anything in a song but the lyrics, such as pitch, volume, rate and pauses. For example, increased volume can lead to feelings of intensity, while decreased volume can lead to feelings of release (Sellnow, 202).

Lyrics are a large part of how a song impacts its listeners. To analyze how lyrics function rhetorically, the illusion of life perspective looks at if lyrics are comic or tragic. Comic lyrics are lyrics that are encouraging with a strong message about the listener overcoming fears and challenges, and tragic lyrics are lyrics that focus on the listener's self doubt, hopelessness, and resentment of their current life situation. The type of lyrics in the song can determine how the song communicates with listeners, and how the listeners interpret the message conveyed. Also in relation to the type of lyrics in the song there are poetic and dramatic illusions. The poetic illusion is looking back into the past, and the dramatic illusion is looking towards the future. Usually, songs with a poetic illusion have release patterns because the past cannot be changed, and songs with a dramatic illusion have intensity patterns because the song's goal is to find a resolution, which is something done in the future. These illusions can also enhance the comic or tragic lyrics and make the message more impactful and relatable for listeners (Sellnow, 204-205).

Another aspect of the illusion of life that is used to analyze how music functions rhetorically is ambiguity and ascription. Strategic ambiguity is a concept that leads listeners towards a belief that they would have not seen as true in the past. It also leads listeners to live vicariously through the song and form a deeper connection with that song in the process (Sellnow, 208). Music can also attract listeners through ascription. Lyrical ascription is the idea that music brings in thoughts and ideas from popular culture to relate to the listeners, and musical ascription is the idea that the sounds in a piece of music are created to appeal to the target audience the song is geared towards (Sellnow, 209).

One of the main goals behind researching using the illusion of life is discovering if the lyrics and score of a song are congruent or incongruent. A congruent interaction is when the rhetorical aspects in a song line up with one another to convey the same meaning, which enforces the persuasiveness of a song. For example, songs with intensity patterns mostly have comic lyrics and poetic illusion, while songs with release patterns mostly have tragic lyrics and dramatic illusion. An incongruent interaction is when the rhetorical aspects in a song do not match up with one another, which could alter the intended message behind the song and change how listeners may interpret that song. For example, if someone is listening to a song about overcoming the odds but the musical score is calmer, this may confuse the listener about the meaning behind the song and decrease the persuasiveness the song was intended to have on the listener (Sellnow, 205).

Analysis

The song "Battle Belongs" by Phil Wickham will be used in the rhetorical analysis behind the importance of worship music, and why it has such deep psychological effects on listeners. This worship song was chosen to analyze using the illusion of life because the song falls into every analytic category provided from the illusion of life perspective.

"Battle Belongs" falls under exhibiting intensity patterns. It has intensity patterns because the music is very upbeat, and it is in the major key which gives off a happier tone. The beat of the song gets listeners excited, makes them pumped up, and on fire for God. Specific musical

aspects that are typically included in songs with intensity patterns include a driving tempo, allegro rate, unpredictable changes, staccato pacing, accelerando, and crescendo (Endres, 103). An allegro tempo is classified as a song with 120 to 168 beats per minute (Farrant). When the analysis was conducted on this song, it was determined that “Battle Belongs” has 162 beats per minute, which categorizes it as a song with an allegro tempo. At the end of the chorus, the sounds of the drums pick up at a rapid pace, which represents a crescendo. Also during the chorus, there is a forte as the song speeds up and progresses to get listeners excited. During the second bridge, when Wickham sings “Thank you God” (Genius Lyrics), it is a staccato. When the song reaches the bridge, there is an unpredictable change in the pacing of the song, as it slows down. However, as the bridge progresses, the song speeds up again, which represents intensity patterns. When listening to the rhythms, harmonies, and tones in a song, it is a reflection of how the listeners want to feel (Vega 366). When people listen to this song, it is because they want the upbeat and exciting tones they hear while listening to encourage them and help them become on fire for God.

The lyrics in “Battle Belongs” can be seen as comic lyrics because they are very encouraging to the listeners. The main premise of the song is about overcoming life's battles with God on your side. To back up this premise, the entire song is filled with uplifting and positive lyrics to show listeners that they can conquer anything with God on their side. In the song, Wickham sings “And if you are for me, then who can be against me? For Jesus there is nothing impossible for You” (Genius Lyrics). This lyric shows listeners that if God is on their side, then nothing is against them or impossible to conquer. This message is encouraging for listeners and assures them that they will be victorious in the end. Wickham also sings that “So when I fight I fight on my knees, With my hands lifted high, Oh God, the battle belongs to you. And every fear I lay at your feet, I'll sing through the night, Oh God, the battle belongs to you” (Genius Lyrics). This is the chorus of the song, and the lyrics sung are very encouraging and triumphant. These lyrics are examples of comic lyrics in the song because of how they have the potential to inspire the listeners to turn to God with their problems, and assure them that if they do, they will win the battle placed before them. Worship music also has sacred lyrics along with comic or tragic lyrics. This means that the lyrics in the song are referring to a spiritual topic, mentioning God or Jesus, and referencing the Bible (Vega 369). Every lyric in “Battle Belongs” has Biblical background, so the lyrics can be defined as sacred as well as comic due to their encouraging nature. Having a combination of sacred lyrics and comic lyrics reinforces the message that Wickham is attempting to share through his lyrics, which makes the message even more powerful for listeners.

The illusion in “Battle Belongs” is seen as dramatic. This is because of the song looking towards the listeners future, and providing the listeners with assurance that God will always be there to fight all their battles for them. Lyrics from the song that represent the dramatic illusion are “So when I fight, I'll fight on my knees, with my hands lifted high” (Genius lyrics). The word “when” in these lyrics is a future tense word, meaning that it is used when speaking about events that will happen in the future. When Wickham sings these lyrics, he is saying that in the future, to fight his battles, he will fight on his knees with his hands lifted high towards God. This song gives listeners excitement about the future, because God will help them fight all their battles through turning to Him.

“Battle Belongs” also is an example of strong strategic ambiguity in music. The goal of the lyrics in the song is to inspire people, believers or not, to turn to God with their troubles and battles. The basic and self explanatory lyrics in the song make it easy for unbelievers to interpret, and the encouragement behind the lyrics has the potential to drive unbelievers and believers

towards Christ (Wright). Lyrics to show how this song exhibits strategic ambiguity are “Nothing can stand against the power of our God” (Genius Lyrics). This lyric in particular educates listeners, believers and nonbelievers, that no problem is too big for God. If you turn to God with your troubles, then He will help you through it. There are some Christian songs out there that cannot be easily interpreted by nonbelievers, so they do not have strategic ambiguity. When nonbelievers or struggling Christians try to listen to and interpret Hymns during church or in a social setting, they have a difficult time and shut down worship music altogether. There are some churches that do not sing Hymns for this very reason, so worship can be easily interpreted by all, no matter how far you are in your faith journey (Vega 369). Therefore, “Battle Belongs” is a more persuasive worship song because it can be easily interpreted by anyone in any stage of their faith journey.

Lyrical ascription is also present in “Battle Belongs.” The target audience of this song are Christians, also aiming at nonbelievers in an attempt to show them the power of Jesus. The lyrics in this song are used to relate to popular culture and the Christian believing audience by having the lyrics reflect popular Bible verses. The lyric “When all I see is the mountain, you see the mountain moved” (Genius Lyrics) reflects the famous Bible verse Matthew 17:20. This verse states that “Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you” (Bible NIV). The meaning behind this Bible verse is Jesus telling his disciples that if they have faith in Him and in God, then they will be able to move mountains, as nothing will be impossible for them. Another lyric in the song that reflects a famous Bible verse is when Wickham sings “When all I see are the ashes, you see the beauty, thank you God” (Genius Lyrics). This song is a reflection of Isaiah 61:3, which states “and provide for those who grieve in Zion- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes” (Bible NIV). The meaning behind this Bible verse is how the Lord gives his followers beauty instead of ashes. If God’s followers see themselves as ashes, then He sees them as beauty. Therefore, “Battle Belongs” exhibits lyrical ascription, as the song has Bible verses embedded in its lyrics. The Bible is an important part of Christian pop culture, so including Biblical references in the lyrics moves the listeners more through the lyrics.

After the rhetorical analysis of this song concluded, it was clear that the lyrics and musical score in “Battle Belongs” was congruent. “Battle Belongs” was proven to have a combination of comic lyrics with dramatic illusion and intensity release patterns, which reinforces the emotional meanings behind the song. As a result of this song being congruent, this song has the ability to effectively persuade the listeners about the power of God, whether they are a believer or not. The congruence of this song makes it easier for listeners to interpret the lyrics, and take away the message that Wickham intended for them to hear (Sellnow, 205).

Contributions to Rhetorical Theory

Rhetorical scholars should continue to study this topic because they can learn the specifics behind how music impacts people. This is also an important topic for musicians to learn so they can know how to create music to effectively impact their target audience. This study contributes to the greater good of rhetorical theory because it shows how music can function rhetorically, specifically how it works in persuading listeners to think deeply about the intended meanings behind a song.

The chosen artifact “Battle Belongs” is an amazing example of how a song can function rhetorically and congruently. The combination of the comic lyrics, intensity patterns and dramatic illusion create an exciting experience for listeners that encourage them to worship God and go to Him in times of trouble. This artifact was chosen to answer the research question because it has an upbeat tone, with encouraging and relatable lyrics that remind the listeners of the power of God. Listening to the positive uplifting lyrics present in the song subconsciously persuades listeners that God is someone that they can trust who they can turn to when they have a problem. When looking at worship music as a whole after doing this research, it can be concluded that when listening to “Battle Belongs” and other encouraging worship songs, the audience takes on the role of follower of Christ, empowered by the music, and God is seen as the King, ruler of all, someone they can turn to with their worries in times of trouble. The role taken on by the audience is very powerful and life changing, and it truly shows the strong impact worship music has on our society. Worship music was brought to us on earth as a gift from God to help spread His love throughout this world, and as a way for more people to learn about him through one of the most persuasive outlets out there.

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