

# Swing a New Song to the Lord

## Resources for Jazz Worship

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## Introduction

We are pleased to offer this publication of congregational music in a jazz idiom. It is a new resource for congregations, musicians, worship planners, and pastors.

Jazz musicians have arranged and performed the music of the church for decades, but much of it has not been fitting for congregational participation. All too often, either the music has been an end in itself – a showpiece of creativity, expertise, or inclusivity – or it has been sufficiently tamed by the church so that it lacks the depth and passion of an authentic jazz performance.

Over the course of fifteen months, our task force studied the nature of congregational song. We visited jazz worship services around the United States and met many imaginative musicians. At every point, we kept asking how jazz could be a resource for faithful Christian worship. Occasionally this presented significant challenges for us. For instance, jazz frequently emphasizes individual creativity through the role of the soloist. Music for Christian worship, however, must include the people of a congregation as participants, not as mere audience members.

It was our concern to address these concerns by gathering and printing jazz-based music for the church. We were fortunate to receive many submissions from the US and Canada, which augmented some of the music that has been composed for our own congregation. The result is this collection, which includes many new arrangements of familiar music, along with a significant number of new compositions. All of the musical resources have been “tested” in congregational settings, and played by professional jazz musicians during Sunday worship services.

To make this collection as accessible as possible, most of the arrangements are printed in a simplified piano format. In a few cases, the music is printed in a very basic “lead sheet” format, with a melody line and chord symbols. We have tried to include enough musical information so that those who are untrained in jazz improvisation would have something to play. At the same time, we have left enough music “off” the printed page, so that beboppers do not feel confined by these arrangements.

The point is that all the notes aren’t “here.” You have to add them yourself. Jazz musicians remind us that written music is a contradiction in terms; music is made, not written. Jazz is a particularly spontaneous form of music in which new melodies are created in improvisation, and existing harmonies are altered in the performance. There are forms and structures to this music, but they exist for the greater purposes of creativity, inspiration, and honest expression.

Rather than restrict the spontaneity of jazz by printing too many notes in this collection, we would strongly encourage the church musician to study jazz harmony and improvisation. We believe such knowledge can deepen and expand the ministry of church musicians. A number of textbooks are available from [www.jazzbooks.com](http://www.jazzbooks.com). Additional help may be found through some of the musicians who are introduced in the back of this volume.

The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, Grand Rapids, MI, facilitated this project through a generous worship renewal grant. We offer special thanks to John Witvliet, Cindy Holtrop, and Ron Rienstra from the Calvin Institute family for their spiritual and financial support. The funds

from this grant project allowed us to meet some extraordinary musicians, including Deanna Witkowski and Chuck Marohnic. They have become good friends and invaluable colleagues.

We are also thankful for the many creative musicians who have used their abilities to explore this music within the context of worship. Thanks go to Al Hamme (who also copy edited much of this material), Tom Whaley, Tony Marino, Steve Gilmore, Joe Roma, Mike Carbone, Warren Cooper, Susan Kelly, and the choir of First Presbyterian Church, Clarks Summit, PA.

Finally, a word is offered about the purpose of this edition. The collection is organized around Colossians 3:16 –

*“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly;  
teach and admonish one another in all wisdom;  
and with gratitude in your hearts  
sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.”*

All the compositions and arrangements are collected as psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (which includes worship music). This volume is offered in the hope that Christ’s living Word would dwell richly within those who sing - and swing - a new song to the Lord.

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