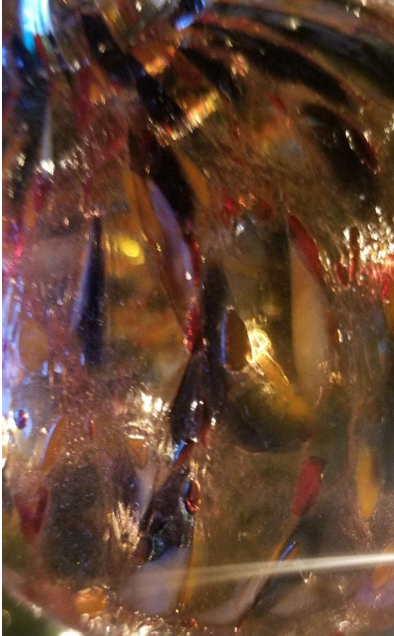


Mashup

Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda

Rev. Rodrigo Emilio Solano-Quesnel

30 January, 2022



Glass Medley © 2022 Rod E.S.Q.

If you're like me, you probably like a few different types of music. My taste spans from classical to heavy metal. I also like a good dose of pop, as well as Mexican folk music, which itself encompasses a diverse umbrella of genres and styles.

But if you were to ask me what genre of music is my favourite, I'd probably have to say the *mashup*. At its most basic level, mashups involve splicing different musical pieces together to make a new composition that incorporates its sources in a way that they complement and

enhance each other. This often results in a richer piece, and invites us to look at its sources in a new way.

It's a similar concept to a medley, although mashup culture often goes further by overlaying different songs, playing parts of them simultaneously so that they play off of each other. Another way to do it is to play certain songs, but in a style that might be unexpected, given the perceived incompatibility of their genres, yet yielding results with a surprising compatibility... and even a new life to a song that might have become a bit too familiar.

Last Easter, I shared that going down a musical rabbit hole may lead us into interesting places, such as mashups that incorporate modern pop music played in a medieval style – this practice that has become known as *bardcore*, and it has become a bit of a cottage industry and a genre in its own right.

Indeed, there are even bands that specialize in mashups, often playing certain well-known songs in a different style. One of my favourites is the Mexican group *Tropikal Forever*, which plays pop classics from the 80s and 90s in a Latin cumbia style. Another gem that I've come across is the band *Beatallica*, which plays versions of *The Beatles* songs in the style of the heavy metal band *Metallica*.

For me, one of the most gratifying aspects of this mashup genre is that – beyond offering a fun and enjoyable piece of music – they also stimulate a new appreciation for how things may synergize together, offering something that can be greater than the sum of its parts. There's often an element of surprise, and a fresh challenge to preconceptions about what different currents can or cannot go together, as tranquil streams that meet and merge.

Our own faith tradition is a real-life religious mashup. The reason that our name is such a mouthful – *Unitarian Universalism* – is a testament to our two main sources: two traditions that saw that they could complement each other and create something new, greater and more inspiring than either one could be by themselves.

The Universalist message of radical inclusion, along with the Unitarian practice of challenging strict orthodoxy, augmented each tradition's ability to inspire and guide a more fulsome living tradition.

Of course, we don't have a monopoly on the spiritual mashup business, most religious traditions have done something similar at some point. The Christmas story most of us know, and which we shared last month, as is our custom, is itself a mashup of the gospels of Matthew and Luke, to give just one notable example that we've inherited from our Protestant roots.

Now, the excitement that comes from hearing and living mashups, is also tempered by the sobering realization that they aren't as easy as they

look. Sure, once you hear them, it's obvious that the two pieces do well together. But it takes a keen ear and serious legwork to feel out what these pieces might be, and to arrange them in a way that truly works, beyond simply playing them at the same time. And I've been around the mashup block long enough to see many instances, when... the mashup doesn't actually work out as well as it might have seemed at first glance.

In our live online service, we tried out singing certain "hymn mashups" of sorts, using the lyrics for one hymn with tunes that are usually played with other unrelated hymns. And yet, it works... usually. This practice is such an established tradition, that our hymnal – and those of many other religions – actually have a built-in tool in them for service leaders to do just that. It's the *metrical index of tunes*, which has a systematic cataloguing of tunes that are likely to work with other hymns, based on their poetic metre, particularly how the syllables are arranged in the hymn. Without this tool, many pairings simply wouldn't work. In fact, there are some pairings that still don't work, even when they're compatible on paper.

And indeed, as natural as the merging of Universalists and Unitarians may seem to many of us now, it took many decades for it to realize in a feasible way. Trust had to be built, extensive talks and negotiations were held... there were some false starts. And it also took the visionary leadership of their respective youth groups to just go ahead and start working together, officially or not, and demonstrate that, yes, this can work!

And current Unitarian Universalism continues to follow this lead. Many members bring elements of their own birth traditions, or elements of traditions that they have come to follow and see that they are often compatible with the culture of our faith.

And here is where it can also get tricky. Because incorporating many traditions isn't always as easy or appropriate as it looks. This can be

especially true when there isn't an adequate appreciation or understanding for other source traditions that sometimes come into our community. Aspects that may seem complementary at first glance, might not reflect what a source tradition actually proclaims or practices, and the result may be harmful or disrespectful.

As we explore other faith traditions, it is a common experience to observe just how many similarities there are among them – and this is exciting, as it may illustrate a certain unity in the spiritual experience that we might not always be aware of. But there is also the risk that we may be tempted to ignore unique elements from a certain tradition.

Yes, there is considerable overlap in most of the world's spiritual paths, but it would be inaccurate – even insensitive – to say they are all the same. There are reasons why people follow different paths. There are elements that may be important, perhaps central, to people who are observant in a particular faith tradition, and it would be a disservice to disregard or dismiss these differences, without respecting or understanding why they may be important.

And yes, we do have much to learn from other faith traditions, especially when we're open to seeing how they challenge our own preconceptions, and how they may complement the values and practices that are important to us and bring us deeper understanding of our own spiritual perspective.

These are enriching opportunities, as long as we remember to remain respectful, tread carefully, wait to be invited into learning, and accept the invitations when they come. It also serves us to consider that, just because we understand one aspect, it doesn't mean we have a true handle of what is significant in another tradition. When exploring new faiths, it is worth removing our proverbial sandals, for we are treading on holy ground.

With all these considerations in mind, we also consider that the mashup ethos is perhaps among the more powerful forces in creativity and

innovation. It is also a reminder that new knowledge and new creation rarely exists in a vacuum, it is often the result of collaboration among many individuals, and importantly, teams of people – across space... and time. Last November, we explored the collaboration of scientists, medical professionals, and enthusiastic researchers across the centuries, whose collaboration over space and time have brought us life-saving medications and procedures, like insulin and vaccines.

My friends, we owe a lot of what is new to what is old. Moreover, current wisdom tends to come from more than one source. Especially when it brings in new perspectives, or when it challenges what we've been accustomed to.

My friends, it takes work for things to work together. And it can be incredibly gratifying when they do.

My friends, with a lens of responsibility, we may access a lens that magnifies what is already here, and find new paths, inspiring complementary vision from streams that meet and merge.

So may we collaborate,
In optimism, caution, and grace,

Amen

Suggested Hymns:

Opening Hymn #145 As Tranquil Streams

~)| Words: Marion Franklin Ham, 1867-1956

Music: *Musicalisches Hand-buch*, Hamburg, 1690, adapt.

WINCHESTER NEW – TRY SINGING IT WITH DANBY

Hymn #126 Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing

Words: v. 1 Robert Robinson, 1735-1790, adapt.,

~)| vs. 2-3, Eugene B. Navias, 1928-

Music: John Wyeth, *Repository of Sacred Music, Part II*, 1813

NETTLETON – TRY SINGING IT WITH HYFRYDOL

Closing Hymn #148 Let Freedom Span Both East and West

Words: Anonymous

~)| Music: Betsy Jo Angebrannt, 1931- , © 1992 Unitarian Universalist Association

CHRISTMAS HYMN – TRY SINGING IT WITH LAND OF REST