

# Why Music Matters

## ECLECTIC PERFORMANCES INSPIRE CORNELL'S CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

By Francine Barchett, Cornell '20

Why do the arts matter to the faith?" On a cold, mid-February evening, Duke Divinity School Professor Jeremy Begbie posed this simple, yet provocative, question to Cornell's packed Statler Auditorium. At the Chesterton House-sponsored event, young and old from campus ministries and a plethora of local churches gathered to listen as the British theologian spoke, shared personal photographs, and performed his most anticipated action of all: gracing the piano's black and white keys.

"I do not go so far as to say that music can prove the existence of God," Begbie reasoned. "Still, both faith and music make us wonder if there's more to this world than we can ever grasp."

One night later, as a seemingly planned response to Begbie's profound statements, Philadelphia-raised Christian jazz singer Ruth Naomi Floyd wowed the same auditorium with her soulful progressions and wide vocal range. Although Begbie and Floyd approached their music from differing perspectives, their appearance at Cornell inspired students and community members alike to view music as a manifestation of God's transcendence, grace, and love.

Why do the arts matter to the faith? Whether through hearing Begbie's piano or Floyd's voice, the answer remains much the same. Through playing short piano snippets and dissecting their spiritual implications, Begbie argues that songs coincide perfectly with the biblical metanar-

rative of human history. Songs begin at a point of equilibrium, escalate into tension or dissonance, and then conclude with endings that usurp the prospects of the beginning. Similarly, humanity's perfect beginning in the Garden of Eden was followed by separation from God during the Fall and

calls "the greatest blues singer of all," laid aside His heavenly prominence to die for the world's sins.

Besides formulating theological arguments out of music, Floyd and Begbie's presence inspired the Cornell community to advance modern Christian music. "If I could partner every



Photo Credit: David Navadeh Photography

Jeremy Begbie



Photo Credit: David Navadeh Photography

Ruth Naomi Floyd

ultimately led to Christ's redeeming work on the cross. "The resurrection did not balance the cross," Begbie asserts. "It overwhelmed it." And the cross is not all—heaven and earth's destiny is the eternal renewal promised in Revelation.

Musical tension and resolution also have historical implications, as Floyd shared with her audience one night later. Just like her great grandparents were slaves who advocated for American equality, Floyd believes that every good song and human experience contains moments of ugliness and suffering that bring definitive resolutions. Even Jesus, whom Floyd

church musician with a film score writer, I would," Begbie joked. If Christian music were more action-oriented, if it truly evoked the emotions and symbolism of the Bible, Begbie believes it would be purely enthralling. Floyd also expressed dissatisfaction with today's Christian music, recalling that she turned to jazz partly to reach non-believers. Moreover, she defends her decisions to record with musically talented non-Christians because "we should not just focus on our message, but also the [musical] vehicle through which we deliver our message."

While more progress is necessary

to hoist Christian music to higher levels of excellence, Begbie and Floyd's performances at Cornell confirmed that much work has already been done. Through watching their riveting

performances, the Cornell community learned that music is not just a temporary means of enjoyment, but a way to taste of the glory to come. Furthermore, music playing is not just

an ability acquired for personal pleasure, but rather a gift designed to glorify God and explain who He is. Yes, music matters to the faith. | [CU](#)