



CHAPTER SIX

WHEELCHAIR

DANCING

WHEELCHAIR DANCING

LET THEM PRAISE HIS NAME IN THE DANCE



Psalm 149: 3

“The moon is the reflection of your heart and moonlight is the twinkle of your love.”

— Debasish Mridha

It requires one only to read the Scripture from Genesis 1:31 that states: “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning-the sixth day,” to realize why the poet, Debasish Mridha penned the above reaction to moonlight. Anything created or touched by the hand of the Almighty can be nothing short of spectacular; causing our emotions to erupt.

Thus, when the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array by him, is it any wonder that man struggles to capture the essence of the surrounding landscape with words or color? If the Almighty evaluated his own work as being, “GOOD”, does it not give us pause to rethink the dictionary definition of the word; so much perhaps because man has underestimated its value?

Folks, since God proclaimed night as good, shouldn't we be prompted to look within the darkness of our own hearts to see why we classify it as something totally the opposite. After a time of contemplation, I would imagine the results will be connected to how mankind chooses to behave within that 24-hour time period, rather than how our Father originally intended it to be used. So often, it is viewed with fear because of being unable to make out the shapes or sounds that are associated with that interval. We are afraid of what we cannot literally see or understand. Yet, faith in our Lord depends totally on being assured of what we are unable to see; “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”([Hebrews 11:1](#) | [NIV](#) |)

Yet, by chance, if you could be extended the opportunity of magically entering the photograph above, one can only imagine your response. After all, how can a mind even resurrect words that are able to capture an individual's thoughts and reactions brought on by unbridled emotions that suddenly surface as you stroll beneath heavens canopy of countless stars brightly winking at you from the vast night sky above?

Thus, having finally acclimated to your surroundings, there is no doubt but what you, through the actions of some magnetic force, find yourself drawn to the enormous, perfectly shaped harvest moon beaming its golden glow through the bare branches of a stately tree whose elegant form has suddenly taken center stage in your focus. Consequently, after you visually caress each inch of its bark covered form, the realization suddenly dawns in your mind that even its scars, labeled as imperfections during daylight that have been brought on by simply living, make up the character it now proclaims.

Then, as your eyes continue their journey down toward its immense trunk, what appears to the human eye, as merely a single black hunk of protruding bark on one of its limbs, moves ever so slightly, before releasing the sweetest musical notes your ear can recall. Folks, simply because it has a song to sing reserved especially for its mate, you soon recognize it as the silhouette of the northern mocking bird announcing to the world, a well-kept secret. Totally clothed in the understated color of gray feathers by day, in the darkness of night, its image is suddenly transformed into nothing less than mystical and

has chosen eventide to fill the air with the most beautiful love strains ever imagined, all due to the fact it simply has a song to sing reserved especially for its partner; and....in the dark hours of night.

Consequently, is it any wonder that directly beneath in the shadows of the branches, the feet of ballroom dancers, softly bathed in the golden moonbeams, suddenly come to life praising the Great Creator in dance? Here beneath the cover of darkness, possessing souls that have been stirred by the sounds and colors of night, three couples sway uncontrollably to strains of the throaty notes because of emotions that have been propelled into action.

Author, Maureen Mc Carthy Draper says it best with these words: *“Sound flows into and throughout your body like oxygen. You can think of the body, with its nerves and heart strings, as the lyre upon which your life plays. When music comes into this sensitive instrument, it can stimulate the life force on the deepest levels. But, you must be ready to receive it. And you must listen with your whole body.”*

Dance

Ladies and Gentlemen, the quote from Maureen Mc Carthy should give us pause to ask if this statement includes only those individuals that label themselves as professionals, or attendees of vocal and dance classes. When one studies the meaning behind the words, does it not include all mankind; signifying the Creator has hardwired all of us to sing and dance?

When contemplating these thoughts, let us allow our minds to revisit nature once again for an explanation. How many times has man included nature when either describing its beauty or naming pieces of music; i.e.,” *Waltz of The Flowers*” or *“Falling Leaves”*? When listening to the performance of these arrangements, clearly, movement or dance can be felt and heard. Actually, can one not view the aspects of nature as an enormous dance of life; including the seasons in which all human beings live?

Thus, if the conclusion has been reached that every individual enters the world possessing the ability with emotions that will react to the sounds of musical strains so dramatically that movement/dance occurs, how is it that we have allowed performers to replace our own natural feelings? Why must just a few be viewed as the only ones “good” enough to sway to musical sounds that fill the air all around us? Is it not time for us to take back the God given gift of song and dance; allowing ourselves to have freedom of expression?

Lin Marsh, a singing leader with the British Council’s World Voice program clearly explains not only how connected music and dance are to one another, but also when they are developed in the human body with the following statements:

“The meaning of music or dance is not dependent on language. Our first response to music is through the movement of the body. Babies create their own choreography (in the womb, they are practicing stretching, kicking and hitting movements) and small children become totally absorbed in the physical sensation of movement.”

“By four months, a baby can recognize facial expressions and interpret emotions. Laughter begins soon after, and then much of the world is encountered through play and sound. By six months, babies recognize and respond to songs with movement, using toys to shake, rattle and bang.”

“Song, music and dance can help children become more imaginative, self-aware and collaborative global citizens.”

Added to these dramatic words above regarding the importance and chronological age music and dance have been recorded as first occurring in children, is a personal experience from the writer. Recently, after being asked if she had photos of her infant grandchild, a grandmother proudly began sharing videos filmed when the little one was only 2 ½ months old while reclining in a musical swing. Folks, even at this early age, the infant could be seen obviously “bopping” in time with the music. When the music stopped, her movements ceased, as well. After watching several videos of the child ranging in age from 2 ½ months to 4 months, it was very easy to draw the conclusion that this little one was reacting to the strains and responding to music through movement.

Given this story about a child’s response to music, does it make you wonder why individuals often state, “I cannot sing or dance.” Truly, the real question should be, “When and why do people suppress their ability to move to music?”

Perhaps, the real issue that should be addressed is society’s view toward “performance.” When did people allow themselves to become members of an audience, rather than inviting their own bodies to respond to music?

Certainly, when researching the definition of dancing, rather than described as a natural response by human beings to music, a litany of terms related to professionals fill the screen. Is it not time for the child from within each of us to surface once again and allow our toes to start tapping to the music from within our souls?

Ladies and gentlemen, one thing that happens in the winter season of life that is brought on by the aging process is the shedding of layers. These old souls are living in the moment and are no longer encumbered by the worry of what others will think about their actions. They simply enjoy the things that make up every second of their existence by releasing the inner spirit within. When first observing this behavior, it reminds one of a bird being released from a gilded cage.

Therefore, whether sitting in a wheelchair or reclining in bed, when music enters their sphere, be prepared for a pleasant surprise. Even though they are restricted by parts of their body that no longer work well, a reaction will suddenly occur when they hear their preferred musical arrangements. **It may be the head bobbing, a toe tapping, shoulders swaying, clapping their one hand that works against a leg, clicking of the tongue, or swaying of the upper body; actions that are labeled in their winter season of life as dancing; thus, *the definition of wheelchair dancing.***

Wheelchair Dancing

Interestingly enough, when researching wheelchair dancing on line, you will mostly find articles and photographs of someone in a wheelchair being moved around by an agile partner, or an individual able to put his/her own wheelchair in motion.

However, that is not how the residents at Glendale Gardens in Springfield, Missouri do wheelchair dancing. They simply sit in their wheelchairs and are taught to use whatever part of their body that will move in keeping time to music. And...folks, do they move! When the music starts, their emotions take over and that childlike spirit that has been at rest swings into action!

Word To The Wise: Do not treat wheelchair dancing as exercise. Instead, allow it to be a special glamorous time and watch their reactions. Invite the residents to wear whatever adornment they might still possess for the kickoff. (Hair ribbons, necklaces, scarves, or even make-up)

Procedure

Kickoff: In order to offer motivation, ball room dancers were brought in for an evening of glamour and grace. Three couples, dressed in beautiful garments, performed at 6:45 one Thursday evening; a time when most of the residents were already in their bed clothes. What at first appeared as a very sleepy audience, soon came to life in a big way. After all, who could resist being enticed by couples gliding gracefully across the floor in time to tunes the residents had learned during their twenties?

As the evening unfolded, staff members danced with those that were able to stand, while others simply moved the body part that was still functioning. As you view the beautiful still shots below of this spectacular evening, please note the number of heads bent toward the floor. They were absolutely mesmerized by the dancers' graceful feet.

When the last chord ended and the dancing feet rested, the residents did not want to go to their rooms and hit the hay. Instead, they just kept their eyes focused on the dancers in hopes those magic feet would come to life once again. Actually, a few even insisted on remaining for about 30 extra minutes anticipating the dancers return to the floor. One resident named Dorothy even remarked, "I loved this evening. Even though I never learned to dance, my parents always were thrilled to move around to music right in our own living room. We did not have much materially, but those old rugs were rolled up and they danced as a way of celebrating a hard week of work on the farm. I could picture them dancing right along with those wonderful people tonight."

Step 1:

Music: Choose music the residents would have heard during their early twenties for best results. (If dancers within the community have performed as a way of kicking off the program, try to recall the titles of their music and play it as a part of the next step. If not, just choose music they would have been familiar with during their early years.)

Step 2:

Prior to step 1, be certain to talk it up with the residents so they realize it will be a fun time; not exercise. It would be great to have balloons flying or streamers in the activity room. Encourage them to wear adornments to the first session. **ABOVE ALL, GATHER THE RESIDENTS OR THEY WILL FORGET TO COME.**

Step 3:

Arrange the residents in a semi-circle, making sure to allow ample space between wheelchairs for their waving of arms. Place the leader's chair in front of the group, being sure each person can easily see your moves. Also, when giving directions with music in the background, make sure you project your voice so all can hear.

Q: Does the activity director need to be a professional dancer? NO! You are just going to wiggle your body in time with the music. Don't be inhibited, move the parts of the body they can mimic. Be free!

Laugh and have fun. Encourage them to think of new ways to keep time. Your goal is freedom of expression. Encourage the child within to come out and dance.

Step 4:

Allow time between songs to rest. During that time, encourage them to share memories relating back to their earlier years. Did you dance? Where did you go to dance?

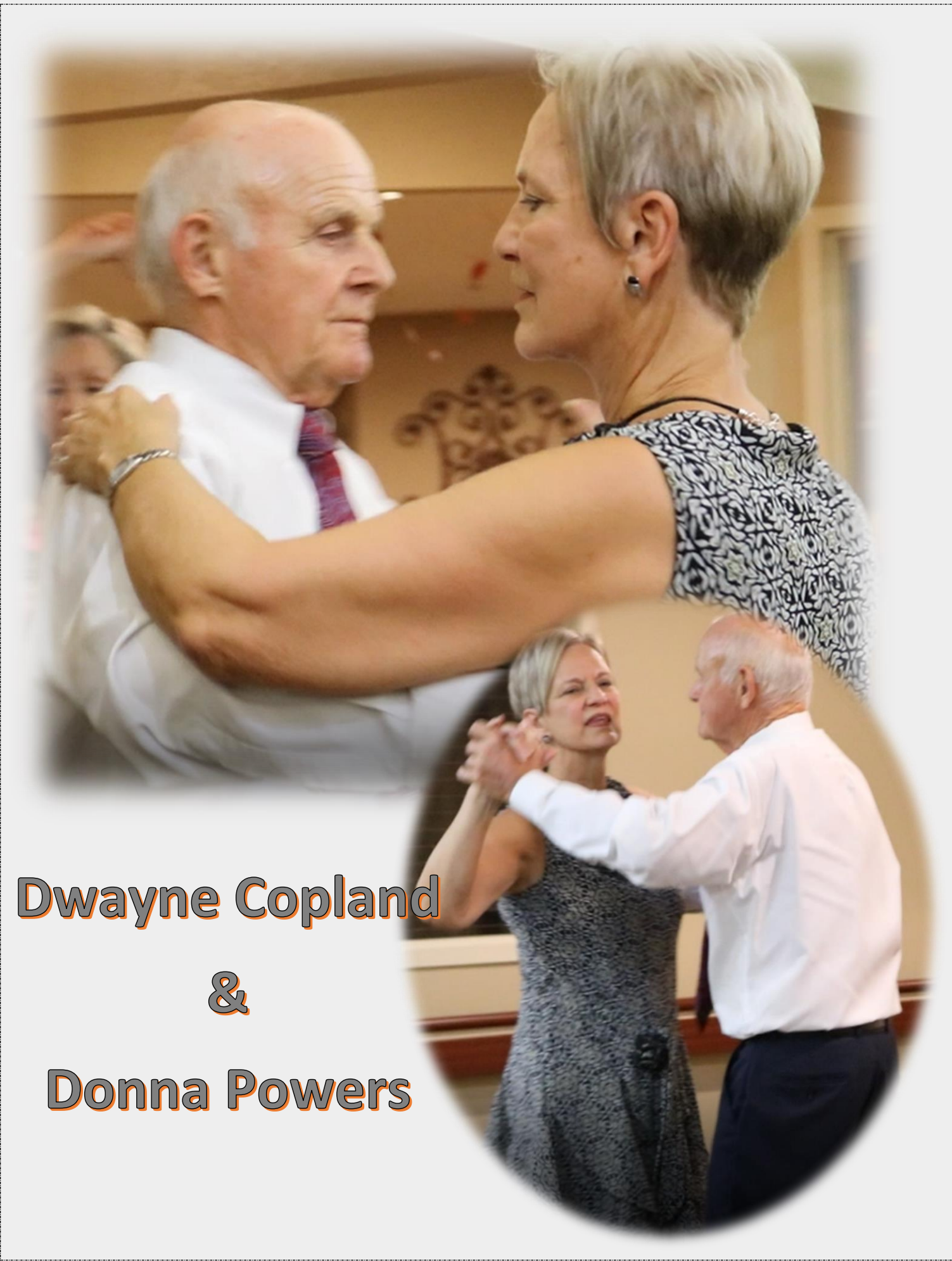
Step 5: After completing the wheelchair dancing, offer refreshments. (Punch, Cookies)

Step 6: As you continue wheelchair dancing, think about themes that will promote a celebratory type atmosphere. (Snowball Dance, Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, Spring Fling, May Pole Gala, Easter Fun, Patriotic Tunes, Picnic Fiesta (outside on the patio), Autumn Harvest, Christmas Ball)

MEET THE BALLROOM DANCERS

Debbie & Bob
Williams





Dwayne Copland

&

Donna Powers



Cindy & Ron Douglas



Watch the reactions of the residents as those dancing feet moved across the floor.



All this dancing makes a
body thirsty!

2.P



**Then the action began. Staff members
danced, too!**



Activity Director Tim asked resident Wilma for a dance.



Edna's turn!



Followed by Deborah.



What a great evening!

WHEELCHAIR DANCING TO HYMNS

DANCING AS PRAISE TO GOD

What? Would dancing not be out of line and disrespectful to God? Not really! Let's review Biblical history regarding dancing as a way to praise the Lord. Before introducing this, use devotional time to establish the background on answering the question: Did Jesus dance?

2 Samuel 6: 13-14

¹⁴Wearing a linen ephod, David was dancing before the LORD with all his might, ¹⁵while he and all Israel were bringing up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets."

Psalm 149: 3

"Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with timbrel and harp." (Timbrel like a tambourine.)

In the Bible, the Israelites use dance as a form of religious expression. From images of Miriam leading the women across the Sea of Reeds to numerous references throughout the Psalms, it is clear that dance was an expression of joy, awe and worship. It's important to remember that the peoples of the ancient eastern Mediterranean had many different kinds of folk music: songs for births, weddings, funerals and various celebrations throughout the life cycle. We do not have any of the melodies from this time for Judea as there was no written notation and mechanical recording was not invented until the late 1880s. But the music of those ancient times may have resembled, in both form and content, much of the folk music of the Jews, Samaritans, Armenians, Arabs and other inhabitants of the Holy Land during the Ottoman Empire and before – music of which we have recordings that are over 100 years old.

In Roman-occupied Judea, in addition to folk music, there was sacred music, including the chanting of the Psalms by the choirs and musicians of the Temple. But given Jesus's antipathy to the Temple, it is more likely that he knew how to recite, rather than perform, the scriptures – a practice that developed in the more than 300 synagogues that existed in Jerusalem before the Romans destroyed the Temple. This oral tradition of synagogue cantillation has survived unbroken among the Jewish people for more than 2,000 years and still flourishes today. Over the centuries communities in Spain, Eastern Europe and as far away as Iraq, Persia, Yemen and Uzbekistan have developed their own unique styles of cantillation. (Wikipedia)

Did Jesus dance? Since his first miracle was performed at the Wedding at Cana, it can be surmised that he danced. Plus, dancing was simply accepted by Jews as an expression of joy, awe and worship. At a given time in their service, they would simply join hands, dance and sing. They sang different songs depending on how they were feeling. (Joy, suffering, peace, grief) We can use our hymns in the same way.

Once again folks, somehow, dance became associated with bars or places of disrepute, prompting religious leaders to preach against dancing all together; all because man chose to behave badly when making merry.

Actually, keeping time to wonderful old hymns can be used as a way of praising God, and at the same time receiving tremendous benefits personally for the soul. Either use a CD Player to play hymns or a volunteer that plays the piano for this time together.

Suggested Hymn List

Peace:

Amazing Grace, In the Garden, It Is Well with My Soul, Abide with Me (Examples) Discuss types of body movement that signify peace before playing each song.

TROUBLED SOUL: (Anxiety, Grief, Worry)

“Be Still My Soul” Play song to show different moods; meaning sometimes troubled and then relaxed all in one song. See if residents can hear the different moods according to sound. Then decide what types of movements could signal each, followed by the song being played again.

COURAGE TO MOVE FORWARD, DETERMINATION:

“Onward Christian Soldiers (Will march with our feet)

Joy:

“When We All Get to Heaven, I’ll Fly Away (Will get noisy and loud on this one using every possible movement.)

COMBINATION OF ALL IN A MEDLEY: (Above songs mixed together without stopping allowing residents to use all wheelchair dancing techniques) Please end with “I’ll Fly Away’ so they can get loud.

The early church was Jewish and so their musical influence came from the Old Testament. At the time of King David music as part of worship was rich and sometimes extravagant as the people sought to worship God with their best skills. In the temple we read that there were 4,000 Levites appointed to praise God with instruments (*1 Chronicles 23:5*) and 288 trained singers to praise God with their voices (*1 Chronicles 25:7*). It must have been some spectacle.

The Jewish people worshipped God with harps (*Revelation 5:8*), stringed instruments (*Habakkuk 3:19*), horns, trumpets, loud-sounding cymbals, lyres (*1 Chronicles 15: 28-29*), timbrels and tambourines (*Exodus 15:20*), gittith (a stringed instrument) (*Psalms 8*), instruments of ten strings (*Psalms 92:3*), pipes (*Psalms 150:4*), and resounding cymbals (*Psalms 150:5*).

Certainly, music was a vital part of biblical life, as David expresses so well in Psalm 150:

Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with timbral and dancing, praise him with the strings and pipe, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD.



James J. Tissot, 'David Dances before the Ark' (1896-1902), gouache on board, The Jewish Museum, New York.

Conclusion:

You are invited to raise your arms in the air with me as a form of praise to Immanuel, God with us from the beginning, until the end! Glory to the creator of life and all that was, is, and ever will be; a Father that dances with us in our song of life; ever present through sorrow, joy, our life's work, at our final breath, during our resurrection, ascension, welcoming us with open arms as he claims us as his own for all eternity. Sing, dance, and make merry as you triumph in the golden glow of His love now and forever more! Amen and amen!