

# Music Histories and Stories

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Every month we will look at the story behind one of our anthems or hymns or we will learn about a composer/lyricist who provided us with an anthem or hymn from the month. This will give us the opportunity to learn more about what we are singing, listening to, or the people behind the musical gift.

It usually happens that I choose a composer to share about whose music we sing. That is not the case this month. We are learning about a pair of composers who are often on our music list.

I recently came across this story from Lee Dengler and Susan Naus Dengler and was so struck by its power and poignancy that I want to share it with you.



Lee and Susan Dengler are the authors of over 400 choral anthems, cantatas, vocal and piano solo collections that are used worldwide. They have served as music leaders in churches, and have taught music on the elementary, high school and college levels. Both are professional singers. They reside in Goshen, Indiana.

This part of their story was recently printed on the website of Sheet Music Plus:

“Easter was in mid-April that year. We who work in church music are relieved when Easter comes that late in the season, allowing adequate time to prepare for the music of Lent and Easter.

However, there was a lot going on in our house back then. We were awaiting the birth of our second child. The due date was April 1. Because of church responsibilities, we hoped that this baby would arrive on time. Rebecca Joy only made us wait two extra days before she appeared on the scene. Even though Palm Sunday was only two days later, we could fulfill our Holy Week Responsibilities without too much stress.

There were, however, a few things that we hadn't counted on. First, Lee had only recently begun a new daytime job. Also, we had no idea what it would mean to care for a newborn in addition to our firstborn son, Jason, who was only 18 months old. And then Susan contracted the nasty virus that was making its way through our community. All this would have been enough to overwhelm two young adults, but then Lee's grandfather, Grandpop Dengler, was suddenly confronted with critical health problems – problems from which he never recovered. Although there were many things for us to be happy about, Holy Week that year was also tinged with some personal darkness.

Ready or not, the week that marked Jesus's journey to the cross arrives on an annual basis, whether our lives are bathed in joyous light or mired in shadows. Whatever the case, this holiest of weeks affords us the opportunity to truly experience what we believe as followers of the One who faced the darkness of the cross for our sakes. It is a time to place the hope of Jesus's resurrection against the backdrop of death and grief.

Quiet reflection allows us to move from the sober moments of Christ's sacrifice to a most joyful celebration of Easter. Daily disciplines, such as reading the Gospels and contemplative walking, can help us focus our minds. Praying the “Lord's Prayer” or the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm can be excellent models for our prayers during these days. Listening to music, such as Handel's Messiah or hymns that speak of Christ's Passion, can also help to lead us to the light and hope of His victory over death.

Indeed, music has always served as a perfect vehicle to enhance our observance of Holy Week. It has been our personal privilege to create some of the music and texts that portray the sacrifice that Jesus endured for our sakes. In recent months, we have considered the deep darkness that our Savior knew during those days – the physical darkness that the Thursday evening, and the spiritual and emotional darkness of His trial and crucifixion on Friday. This was the greatest darkness the world has ever known. What a blessing to consider that the one who willingly faced this time of profound darkness is with us when we experience dark times in our own lives.”

From these thoughts they were able to write a cantata which was published this year.