

Bosworth Matters

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Fred Francis Bosworth – Man of Music and Worship

How a Childhood Discovery Contributed to His Success
as a Musician and Famous Healing Evangelist

By Roscoe Barnes III

Author, *F.F. Bosworth: The Man Behind Christ the Healer*

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Fred Francis Bosworth (1877-1958)

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Note: This is a snippet of research taken directly from my doctoral thesis, *F.F. Bosworth: A Historical Analysis of the Influential Factors in His Life and Ministry* (University of Pretoria, 2010). The thesis can be read [here](#) or at: <http://repository.up.ac.za/handle/2263/26869>. A concise overview of my research on [Bosworth's life history](#) is presented in the article, "F.F. Bosworth: A Historical Analysis of His Ministry Development Using Social Cognitive Career

Theory" (*Verbatim etc Ecclesia*, April 21, 2011), which can be viewed [here](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2725697):
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2725697

Bosworth's dedication to music is one of several factors that contributed to his development and success as a famous healing evangelist. Music was something in which he engaged for most of his life, and a factor that contributed to his fame. Long before he was criss-crossing the country as an evangelist, and preaching to large crowds, he toured as a musician and played before large audiences (Perkins 1921 & 1927; Bosworth no date a). Bosworth was essentially self-taught and did not have formal training in music (Perkins 1927:64). In addition to the cornet, he exhibited skills for playing the trombone and trumpet (Perkins 1921 & 1927). He often performed with his brother, B.B. Bosworth (Perkins 1921 & 1927). During the 1920s, they published a songbook that was used in their evangelistic healing campaigns (*Revival Flame* 1927; Simmons 1997:311; Milburn 1977). This article will show how Bosworth discovered music and how it played a prominent role in his life and ministry. It will cover his use of music before and after he began preaching.

Discovery and Development

Bosworth discovered a love for music as a child in Nebraska. It was an experience that occurred, in part, through his relationship with his father, Burton F. Bosworth, who was a Civil War veteran. Each year his father would travel to Civil War reunions and other related events held by his veteran comrades. When he decided to attend a reunion in Kearney, Neb., young Bosworth asked to accompany him. At first he apparently showed reluctance, but young Bosworth persisted: "I teased my father until he let me go with him to the soldier's re-union" (Bosworth no date a:1). When they arrived at the event, young Bosworth became intrigued by the 40 brass bands that performed. Bosworth listened intently as the bands played a number of patriotic songs such as "The Union Forever," "Red, White and Blue," and "Marching through Georgia," among others (Perkins 1927:19). During the week that he spent watching and listening to them, he "took a special interest in a cornet" (Bosworth no date a:2). At the time, he was not sure about the exact name of the instrument, so he called it a "horn" (Bosworth no date a:2). He later found a way to acquire the instrument.

Music in Nebraska

Bosworth wasted no time learning how to play the instrument. Using a basic instruction book used for an old organ, he taught himself about musical notes. Before long, he found himself "playing in the juvenile band of the village and later in the senior band" (Bosworth no date a:2). Bosworth also studied a book for cornet players called, "Arban's Method." "To the study of this carefully worked-out method, he applied himself with a devotion seldom excelled by any youth in any pursuit" (Perkins 1927:21).

For Bosworth, playing his new instrument was not merely an exercise in vanity or something that he could do to just pass away time. In truth, it was something for which he deeply cared. "He loved his music and the opportunity to play his cornet in local bands. He loved school somewhat less" (Blomgren 1963:16). He cared so deeply about music that he practiced at every opportunity. For instance, when his family moved close to Lincoln in a suburb called University Place, he worked in a feed store run by his father. When business was slow, Bosworth picked up his cornet and played.

His diligent practice led to noticeable success: "In a very short time I was playing a leading part in the Nebraska State Band. I led a series of twenty concerts in Madison Square, New York"

(Bosworth no date a:1-2). He also played "a leading part in the Nebraska State Band, and the several literary societies of the town frequently sought him to vary the programs of their meetings with some of his remarkable solos" (Perkins 1927:21). From most indications, it appears that Bosworth had the skills and talent needed to become an excellent musical entertainer.

Music in Fitzgerald

During his time in Fitzgerald, Ga., Bosworth found time for his music. "He became the director of the local Empire State Band and toured the state with it. The band rapidly developed into the best amateur organization in Georgia" (Blomgren 1964:16). When he and his band were ready to tour, they established a code of conduct that was based on Christian principles:

Knowing their chief's Christian principles, the boys drew up a set of resolutions, which provided that any member who failed in any way to behave in a gentlemanly manner, when on a trip, should give up his uniform and pay his own transportation expenses (Perkins 1927:31).

The local newspaper, *The Fitzgerald Enterprise*, featured a number of reports about Bosworth and his music. For instance, when he left town to play for a special event in New York, the newspaper reported: "Fred Bosworth, Henry Dyer and Pearl Newcomer, went to New York as a part of the Albany band to welcome [Admiral] Dewey" (*The Fitzgerald Enterprise* 1899b:5). This mention was followed by: "O.H. Johnson acts as city clerk until Fred Bosworth returns from New York and it is plain to be seen that he knows how" (*The Fitzgerald Enterprise* 1899b:6).

In another report, Bosworth is mentioned in an announcement for a concert at New Central Methodist Church that was scheduled for March 28, 1900 (*The Fitzgerald Enterprise* 1900a:8). The announcement lists Bosworth as a cornet player. It also notes his assistance with a choir. Music was of such importance that he dreamed of doing it professionally in some capacity (Perkins 1927:36). Despite this dream, however, he all but "dropped his music because of the incompatibility of its associations from the Christian standpoint" (Perkins 1927:35-36). He apparently wanted the opportunity use music as a ministry, to serve God, while blessing others. In time, he would come to realize his dream and discover the benefits of music that go beyond secular entertainment.

Music as full-time ministry

Since the time of his early childhood, Bosworth had toured and played music before crowds of various sizes. He impressed people of different backgrounds. In Zion City, Ill., he impressed one of the most prominent faith healers in the United States, John Alexander Dowie (Blomgren 1964:16). Dowie, a charismatic and controversial leader, had founded Zion City as a Christian utopia. When he watched a performance by Bosworth, he immediately hired him to be a band leader (Perkins 1927:36).

According to Sumrall (1995:38), the new job was part of God's "getting him to the right place." It was a place in which Bosworth took a meager group of musicians and transformed it into an award-winning band that garnered nation-wide attention. Blomgren writes:

The Zion City Band rapidly changed from a discordant amateur musical group to one of the largest and finest musical organization in the entire United States. Fred Bosworth's reputation spread far and wide. The band toured the nation and triumph after triumph brought fame and recognition to Zion City and its founder" (Blomgren 1964:16).

In addition to impressing Dowie, Bosworth also impressed the critics. After witnessing his concert at Madison Square Garden, a music critic wrote: "The Concert...was awaited with no little apprehension, but before the players on the stage had swept the first four bars of the first overture, all present knew they were listening to real music produced by masters of the art" (Blomgren 1964:16). When Bosworth experienced the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, the experience shared a connection to his love of music. For when he was baptized in the Spirit, he also received a healing: "Previously I had a spot in my lung from too much cornet playing, and the Lord instantly healed me of that when he Baptized me with the Holy Ghost" (Bosworth no date a:7).

Music and Church Planting

Having worked as a band leader in Zion City, Bosworth knew the joy and the power of music in ministry. He had played in churches and before large audiences where he witnessed the effects of his musical talents. Music, he found, brought him fame, prestige and employment. It was something he skillfully used for entertainment, inspiration and worship. However, in Dallas, he would also use it for evangelism and church-planting.

Bosworth moved to Dallas in 1909. When he conducted street meetings in Dallas, he brought along his Bible and trombone.

They first held meetings in their home, then out under the stars with seats made of logs. Bro Bosworth was a talented musician, attracting crowds with his trombone playing. He would give his personal testimony and tell of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. An old baseball player by the name of Jimmy Hutton gave his heart to the Lord, and he became the song leader for Bro. Bosworth. (Loftis 1992:7).

Music and Funerals

In 1919, near the end of the Dallas revival meetings, Bosworth lost the love of his life. His wife, Estelle, died after a bout with TB and other illnesses. Her death occurred shortly after the death of their son, Vernon. Though shaken by the loss, Bosworth drew comfort and strength from Scripture, the fellowship of his church, and from music. In a letter to his daughter and mother, Bosworth writes about the eight days he spent with his wife while she was in a sanatorium in El Paso, Texas. He reports the Lord had "removed all fear and she could talk bout the funeral and the songs and praise the Lord for his sweet presence" (Bosworth 1919a). He uses colorful details to describe her final moments. For example, about 15 minutes before her passing, they shared a song: "She sang with me "We have an anchor" (Bosworth 1919a). He admits that while he had shed many tears, it was not the same as with non-Christians: "[I] have felt wonderfully happy even while weeping" (Bosworth 1919a). Later, after the funeral services, he makes the following observation:

The service opened with "We have an anchor" after Rev. Gaston told that Moma sang it with me a few minutes before she died. Bert and Margaret sang a beautiful duet. Emma and Miss McMath sang another – "Blessed lights of home" I believe it is called—The Chorus "They are calling, gently calling thee to come." Bert sang a solo, "The city four square"...While the people passed by for the last look at Moma's body a quartette sang "The city that's soon coming down," followed by several others....(Bosworth 1919a).

When Bosworth's mother died on Nov. 28, 1939, he and his brother, B.B., used music as a way to honor her and say farewell. Their mother, who was 86 at the time of her death, had been living with one of her daughters (*The Alliance Weekly* 1939:828). F.F. conducted the funeral services at his home in River Forest, Ill., and his brother, B.B., sang a solo of "Shadows." The late Mrs. Bosworth was remembered as one having a "sweet Christian character," and as a "Mother of Israel" (*The Alliance Weekly* 1939:828).

Music in City-wide Healing Campaigns

After years of using music as a tool of evangelism and as an integral part of worship services, Bosworth undoubtedly came to see music as an essential part of his spiritual calling and his ministry repertoire. Although preaching and prayer held the highest priority, especially in terms of evangelism and revival meetings, music held a significant role in many, if not most, of his city-wide healing campaigns.

Music as a Family Affair

Since his brother, B.B., was also a skilled musician and fellow minister, the two of them worked together in music, preaching, and prayer for the sick. On occasion, their wives joined them for musical performances (Perkins 1921 & 1927). Both solo and duet performances were presented. F.F. Bosworth's daughter, Vivien, a pianist, also performed in some of his meetings (*The Alliance Weekly* 1925:674). Typically, B.B. led the song services and sometimes he performed with F.F. At times, B.B. directed a choir. An example of the brothers' work can be seen in numerous newspaper and magazine articles. In Bosworth's biography (Perkins 1921), the author includes a newspaper report that mentions the role of music in the Lima, Ohio campaign:

"Brother B.B. Bosworth had charge of the music and is an accomplished soloist and song leader of a rare type. His slide-trombone solos were enjoyed by all. The two brothers gave excellent duets—Brother F.F. Bosworth with his cornet, and Brother B.B. Bosworth with his trombone" (Perkins 1921:115).

In an article on Bosworth's revival meetings in Detroit, Perkins includes another report that mentions his use of music: "The music, which is in charge of B.B. Bosworth, the younger brother of the evangelist, is exceptionally handled, and souls are stirred by the sweet songs and inspiring music" (Perkins 1921:130). The brothers were described as "deeply spiritual Evangelists" and "most delightful cornet and trombone musicians" (*The Alliance Weekly* 1920:606).

Music on Radio

When Bosworth ventured into radio broadcasting, he used music, along with his teaching, to minister to his audience. His wife was a favorite with listeners. The July 1931 issue of *Exploits of Faith* published the following requests:

We enjoy your programs very much each morning and we are glad to be able to get you on the radio. We enjoyed your ministry while you were here in Joliet, and our whole family of five was saved. We would like to hear Mrs. Bosworth sing "Take Your Burden To the Lord and Leave It There", and Mr. Bosworth play it. May God bless you.—The "Maass" Family, 245 N. Bluff Street, Joliet, Illinois. June 5, 1931 (*Exploits of Faith* 1931:12).

We also want to thank Station WHFC for giving the Bosworth Party one-half hour on the air, hoping they will give them one hour, as we surely enjoy their programs. We are asking Mr. Bosworth to play a trumpet solo.—Mrs. Raymond Dawson, 608 Niergau Street, Joliet, Illinois. June 3, 1931 (*Exploits of Faith* 1931:13).

These comments by the radio listeners may suggest that Bosworth's music was as popular and important on radio, as it was in his meetings. For many years he continued to use music in his meetings and on the air waves.

Music and Race Relations

Besides its use as entertainment and ministry, it appears that music also served as a catalyst for race relations in Bosworth's ministry. During the 1920s, possibly before 1925, Bosworth worked with a black hymnist by the name of Thoro Harris, through whom he published the songbook, *Revival Flame: Bosworth Campaign Special*. "Harris was a child prodigy whose compositions in the Methodist Holiness style found appreciation among Pentecostals" (Simmons 1997:57). The extent of Bosworth's relationship with Harris is not known. However, given the quality of the book published, it appears that he fully endorsed the ministry of Harris. The book consists of 138 pages. While 12 of the songs included were written or arranged by B.B. Bosworth, most were written by Harris. The significance of the Bosworths' relationship with Harris is underscored by the fact that just over a decade earlier, F.F. suffered a severe beating for preaching to blacks. Also, during the 1920s, segregation was actively practiced in the United States.

The Bosworths' work with Harris would not be the only relationship they would share with blacks through the ministry of music. In 1928, F.F. Bosworth held "a series of evangelistic meetings (January 4-?) at [Paul Rader's Gospel Tabernacle in Chicago] with the Tindley Jubilee Gospel Singers" (Jazz Age Evangelism – Timeline no date: <http://www.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/exhibits/cgt/rader18time.html>). The Bosworths also ministered with the Cleveland Coloured Gospel Quartette, a group that represented the finest in black gospel music. Each of its five members had been become Christian through the C&MA. Bosworth invited the group to sing for his meetings in a number of places, including Pittsburgh, Toledo, Chicago, and Toronto, Canada (Niklaus, Sawin & Stoesz 1986:152, 168).

Bosworth's work with black singers during this time may have been coincidental. It may have been divinely appointed or simply a small part of a major trend. It also may have been related to the singers' conversion through C&MA. Either way, music appeared to be the catalyst through which his ministry crossed racial lines to reach people of different backgrounds.

Music and the Post-World War II Revival

During the late 1940s, the beginning of what is called the post-World War II healing revival, Bosworth began working with Evangelist William Branham and his manager, Gordon Lindsay, who later founded Christ For the Nations Institute. Bosworth served as a mentor, advisor, teacher and musician (Lindsay 1950). During his work with Branham, from 1948 to 1958, Bosworth traveled throughout the United States. Together they held evangelistic healing campaigns that filled churches. They also traveled to South Africa and other countries (Bosworth 2000). Throughout this time, even until his death near the end of the healing revival, Bosworth used his musical talent as a form of ministry. From time to time, Branham would call on him to play certain songs during the course of a meeting.

When Bosworth was not ministering, he found time to use his music for wholesome family entertainment. Branham's daughter, Rebekah Branham Smith, recalls he used to visit her family between meetings and play the trumpet. He often played Gospel music (Smith 2004).

From the time of his childhood to his final years in ministry, Bosworth grew as a musician even as he traveled and applied his musical abilities to different causes. His fame and success suggest that he continued to make progress as a performer.

Summary

This article has presented music as one of the common themes found in Bosworth's life history. It has shown that Bosworth discovered a love for music during his childhood while visiting a Civil War reunion. He later acquired a cornet and began practicing. He eventually developed his talent to the point where he could perform in public with bands and in churches. After a number of years of playing, he became a full-time band leader serving under John Alexander Dowie in Zion City.

After accepting his call to the ministry, Bosworth used his musical talents in evangelism and church-planting. When he lost his loved ones, namely his wife and mother, he drew on music as a source of strength and inspiration. He also used music during his well-publicized city-wide healing campaigns.

For much of his ministry, Bosworth worked with his brother, B.B. Bosworth, who was also a musician and singer. They often performed together during revival meetings. When F.F. began his radio ministry, he included music along with his teaching. Sometimes his wife sang as he played a musical instrument. During the 1920s, he published a songbook that was published by the black hymnist, Thoro Harris. F.F. and his brother worked with black singing groups during major campaigns.

Bosworth used music as a central part of his ministry throughout his career. Even when he worked with Evangelist William Branham and other evangelists after World War II, he sang or ministered with his musical instrument.

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about F.F. Bosworth?***

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