

Christian Music Outside Church

Snippets from a Christian Journalist discussion group:

We're planning some musical evangelism, moving on from our recent recording projects based on the concept of God In Plain Language, or Worship for Everyman. We want to take straight-talking music outside the walls of the church and into pubs, etc.

My current puzzle is to create a clear and unmistakeable mission statement in non-churchy language, to explain why Christian music should go into non-Christian areas. It's proving to be a trickier little puzzle than you might think, so I wondered if the combined intellects of the Network wordsmiths would care to help me?

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[Steve] it's a fascinating question, and one that is far too rarely asked. I have to start by saying that as a professional musician and music journalist (and also an ex evangelistic schools-worker musician!), I am deeply uncomfortable with any 'christian' music where the christian part is what important, not the music - the hijacking of an artform for the sake of proselytising. There are so many fine musicians around who totally unselfconsciously sing about their faith - good and bad points - without having any heavy evangelistic agenda that it seems that the last thing the world needs is more christians making a half-assed stab at music with the expressed aim of 'reaching the lost' - it seems to be a deep insult to the musical sensibilities of 'the lost' and also is naive in the extreme.

That's not to say that I think anyone who sings overt christian stuff is bad - not at all - the alternative to crass evangelism isn't not singing about God, it's more to do with allowing songwriters to be poets and artists rather than polemicists. The few blatant attempts to take evangelistic music into pubs that I've been involved in and witnessed have been fist-chewingly embarrassing, though I have also seen bands with a high JPM count (jesus-per-minute - a real

radio statistic!) get on fine in that setting, without feeling the need to hammer it into anyone. By all means, if you're a songwriter, write about the things that are important to you, but please do so honestly, and without feeling like you need to save the world with every song. Songs that paint an overly rosey picture of christian life are transparent in the extreme, songs about faith and life and the struggles of the journey have a resonance that stretches far beyond the walls of the church. Which is why King's X and Bruce Cockburn will always have far more respect outside of the church than Heartbeat would ever have managed no matter how many letters they sent out claiming God was leading them into the charts to bring the gospel to top of the pops. I still cringe when I think about that....

[Russ] We're all in the communications business, so your question is relevant. My own perspective is that music is a creative gift, and we believe in Its Creator - so communicating who He is and what He's about through song is The most natural thing in the world.

[Ian] You make several very good points. I love your comment about the world not needing 'more Christians making a half-assed stab at reaching the lost', which echoes something that Joy Webb (of the Joystrings) said to me: 'God doesn't need to be embarrassed by any of us going out there and making a mess of it.' What we're doing here is putting together a folk/blues/skiffle outfit which will play for the fun of it, with some good thumping acoustic stuff which just happens to have a very strong Christian lyrical content. I have said locally, and it hasn't gone down very well, that if the average worship band goes out and plays a pub, they'll sing 'Jesus, thou art worthy to be praised' and get things thrown at them!

[Russ] For any kind of song to connect with listeners, there has to be a resonance on more than one level: musical, lyrical, emotional, performance, technique, whatever.

My current experience in contributing a song or three into an 'open mike' roots/folk/blues night at a local pub is that

a) people want to be entertained

b) you can sing about anything you like as long as it's GOOD

c) you'll get respect and encouragement if what you do sets out with no agenda other than to satisfy the two criteria above Anyhow, the net result is: I've forged some kind of niche for myself, there's enough variety in what I play that I can't be pigeonholed, and I'm in a position to build

relationships with other performers as well as entertain and drop the occasional thought-provoker in. It's a long-term thing - and I'm in for the long haul. Hope this helps in some way ~:+}

Proceeds from Ian's CD go to a medical charity. Ian's website can be seen at:

<http://www.skywriter.demon.co.uk>

Christian Journalist discussion group:

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Christian Music Links

Currently 'Christian Music' is the most searched for phrase using the word 'Christian' on search engines. Here are some starters:

About.com's listing

<http://christianmusic.about.com>

Christian Music Place

<http://www.christianmusic.org/cmp>

A portal including a discussion group

<http://www.ccmusic.org>

A portal in five languages:

<http://www.rskchristianmusic.com>

<http://www.1christian.net/>

Pirate Christian Radio

<http://www.mypcr.com>