

BEHIND THE WORSHIP – Leonard Jones

Leonard Jones: The Cloud That Changed My Life



Leonard Jones, a worship leader for MorningStar Ministries, will never forget what happened on the final day of a worship conference in 1996. After nine hours of nonstop worship, he started playing a version of the song “I Want to Hold Your Hand” by the Beatles.

“The praise grew to a supernatural level because we were all physically worn out,” recalls Jones, who became a Christian in 1970 during the Jesus People movement. “All at once, a glory cloud appeared in the middle of the stage and stayed for like two minutes, and then rose up all at once and disappeared. It greatly impacted my life . The result was four CDs that changed the direction of worship in the church.”

Jones continues to play marathon praise sessions, including events where people worship for 50 straight hours. “I’ll be doing a lot more of those this year,” he says.

BEHIND THE WORSHIP – Paul Baloché

Paul Baloché on ‘Open the Eyes of My Heart’



From Africa to Azerbaijan, that song has somehow gotten into people’s hearts and languages. Just that simple prayer: “Open the eyes of my heart.”

It was one of those phrases that a pastor friend of mine would pray before he would preach, and ... I would take that phrase and just sing it over and over again. I thought, "Man, this is something we need to sing [as a congregation]. We should get another section to this."

I looked in the Word and saw, "high and lifted up." [The other phrase] is from Ephesians chapter 1. And then the song just came together naturally.

People ask me, "Do you ever get tired of singing it?" And honestly I don't. It's like, "Do you ever get tired of praying the Lord's Prayer?" Repetition isn't a bad thing.

Songwriting has actually been a helpful exercise for my spiritual life because I'm able to prayerfully construct a musical prayer that others can join in with me. You take a profound truth that you hear on a Sunday morning and you just explore that [in a song]. The Bible says, "Pray without ceasing," and to me, songwriting has always been a way to carry that out.

BEHIND THE WORSHIP – Matt Maher

Matt Maher on 'Christ Has Risen'



"Christ Has Risen" was inspired by a third-century sermon by John Chrysostom. The concept is very simple: God used death to destroy death. He didn't even have to lift a finger. He literally tricked death into destroying itself; Jesus used the process of death to completely eradicate it. So now it just becomes a process of transformation, and death is a window or

a doorway.

It became this chorus: “Christ has risen from the dead, trampling over death by death.” I wrote it and then Mia Fieldes from Hillsong helped finish it.

I love to read works by theologians. Saint Augustine, John Chrysostom, Henri Nouwen and C.S. Lewis are some of my favorites. At the time I wrote this song, it was my goal that the record would have a theme, that it would be a record someone could listen to from start to finish and have been taken on a journey—the journey of transformation because of what Christ has done for us.

The reality is that the conception, birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ is a journey that, if we allow it, takes place in our hearts every year, every day and, if we let it, every moment.

BEHIND THE WORSHIP – Rebecca St. James

Rebecca St. James on ‘Song of Love’



“Song of Love” has been used in a lot of churches for corporate worship. The thing that was most powerful for me was hearing it for the very first time in my own home church in Franklin, Tenn., where our praise and worship team did the song often. To hear it being sung by the congregation of familiar faces around me was a very beautiful and memorable moment for me as a writer.

One of the most powerful things that can happen in ministry is

hearing other people using your songs to worship God. To know that a song has been birthed from my own personal relationship in encountering God, and that now other people are encountering Him too through the same words and music I've written, is a very profound experience to me.

I'm a real nature person; I love being outdoors and seeing God's creativity all around me. That really draws my heart instantly toward worship.

That sense of God in the vastness of His great universe of creation that we see all around us was really the inspiration for this song and what it expresses. The lyric line, "The heavens declare You are God" is a very real biblical truth that is ever-present in my mind.

BEHIND THE WORSHIP - Paul Wilbur

Paul Wilbur: Persistent Messianic Worship



It's difficult to stop Paul Wilbur once he puts his mind to something. When he became a Christian—a shocking conversion given his Jewish background and family's lack of interest in religion—his brother stopped talking to him.

Wilbur's response after years of trying to re-establish their relationship? He bought the house next door.

Today the two ride motorcycles together.

BEHIND THE WORSHIP – Joel Augé

Joel Augé: When Facebook, Family & Worship Merge



Joel Augé is a busy guy. His website features tweets about innovation and hockey, book recommendations, photographs of his daughter and—seemingly as an afterthought—a small picture of a CD, suggesting he makes music. Yet Augé, CEO of a Canadian gaming company called HitGrab (the developer of MouseHunt, one of Facebook’s most popular games), doesn’t find his roles as worship leader, family man and “company vision guy” as all that different.

“Worship is an act of responding to what God has already done for us. It’s no different at work. I feel I’m constantly responding to how God is moving our business forward,” Augé says. “My act of worship at work is being a good steward of this opportunity.”

Raised Catholic, Augé once thought of becoming a priest, but that was before puberty and girls. After some wild times, which included dropping out of high school and moving (alone) to Newfoundland, Canada, Augé had a born-again experience and started writing Christian songs. Today he takes something Paul Baloche, his friend and mentor, teaches to heart: be ready for inspiration.

And just because it seems as if he has it all under control doesn’t mean he does. “My song ‘Promises’ ... was [written] before our daughter was born,” Augé recalls. “I had no idea how to be a dad. I was afraid—terrified actually. It was then that I heard the Holy Spirit calm me down with these words, ‘I

will never leave or forsake you; you belong to Me.'”

BEHIND THE WORSHIP – Israel Houghton

Israel Houghton: A ‘Friend of God ‘



During an annual retreat with his worship team, Israel Houghton stumbled upon—or was given—one of his best-known worship songs.

“This guy was walking us through a lesson,” Houghton recalls, “and he handed out a sheet with all these promises of God: ‘Nothing will separate us from the love of God,’ ‘We are more than conquerors.’ And then three-quarters down the page it says, ‘I am a friend of God.’ He says, ‘Everyone, circle one promise that stands out to you.’ I circled the phrase, ‘Friend of God.’ When asked why I chose it, I just started crying.”

BEHIND THE WORSHIP – Don Potter

Don Potter: Talking to God in Worship



Don Potter had heard the admonition to “seek God’s face”

before, yet like many, it left him feeling perplexed. One day while seeking the Lord in the cabin where he was staying, he looked out an upstairs window. “The sky was clear and blue ... and just then I cried out, ‘Lord, I don’t know how to seek Your face—show me Your face!’ When I looked up there was a cloud right outside the same window ... perfectly shaped like a human eye and looking right at me. I stared for a moment and then fell on my face. When I got up, I started writing this song [called ‘Show Me Your Face’].”

Potter waited a year before he sang the song in public; that’s how intimate the experience felt and how concerned he was about “offending my King.” However, that sort of Spirit-filled experience isn’t uncommon for Potter, a musician and producer who, in addition to leading worship at churches around the country, also works with country stars such as Wynonna Judd.

“(As I’m leading worship) I try to hear the heart of people,” Potter says. “I then try and sing that to God as I believe I’m hearing it. After a bit, God will sometimes want to say something back, and I will try my best to repeat the words I hear. Praise-leading is really not leading at all, but offering yourself as a conduit for God to have a conversation with [people].”

BEHIND THE WORSHIP – Martha Munizzi

Martha Munizzi on ‘Because of Who You Are’




To have a song that’s had that kind of life and longevity is incredible. When I wrote it my kids were young and everyone

was getting ready for bed, and I just had a moment to reflect and watch my kids play. Suddenly I started singing the chorus part: "Because of who You are." I kept it to myself and would sing it around the house, but then I thought, "Because of who You are, I give You glory, I give You praise" ... but who is the "You"? I started looking up the names of God: You are my Jehovah Jireh, my provider—all of the different names for God.

I've found that songs about God to God are the songs that people gravitate to; they're the songs that literally change the worship time because it's suddenly not about me, it's about Him and it's directed to Him. It's rallying all of us to sing of His greatness. Those are just the best songs, but they're not easy to write, and when I'm writing I have to remember that.

Peace In the Middle East

A documentary that follows a Palestinian Muslim, a  Palestinian Christian and an Israeli Jew's journey to bring peace in the West Bank, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem won this year's Reel Rose Award for Best Documentary at the John Paul II International Film Festival.

In *Little Town of Bethlehem*, three men born into violence are determined to risk everything to bring peace between their respective religions.

Director Jim Hanon says his documentary doesn't land on one religious side but instead highlights the need for peace among religions and the biblical model of loving your enemies.

Still, producer Mart Green, whose film company has backed other award-winners, hopes the film prompts audiences to at

least ask this question: "Might love be the greatest weapon of all?"