

Shock Rocker Alice Cooper Says He Loves Jesus

His musical persona chilled the spine of many a parent of '70s teens. Few expected Cooper to become a believer.

For some of his fans, it's the most shocking revelation in a 34-year career seemingly set on giving parents nightmares: Alice Cooper loves Jesus.

The singer widely acknowledged as the father of shock rock, whose music and onstage antics once prompted a member of the United Kingdom Parliament to attempt to ban him from the country because of his corrupting influence, has told how the fear of hell turned him to God.

Cooper scored a No. 1 hit in 1972 with "School's Out," an anthem to teen-age rebellion that celebrated the blowing up of a school. Other songs tackled murder and necrophilia, with titles such as "Dead Babies," "Sick Things" and "I Love the Dead."

Although he continues to record and tour with a theatrical horror-style show, which in the past saw him chop up baby dolls and "die" variously by electric chair, gallows and guillotine, Cooper now says: "My life is dedicated to follow Christ."

Away from the stage or studio Cooper is a devoted family man, devout churchgoer, astute businessman and restaurateur, enthusiastic golfer, and dedicated parent who with his wife annually helps local schoolchildren put on a big stage-production.

Although he became a Christian in the 1980s, the 54-year-old singer has always been guarded about his faith except for brief comments in some interviews—such as when he told Britain's Sunday Times Magazine last year: "Drinking beer is easy. Trashing your hotel room is easy. But being a Christian, that's a tough call. That's real rebellion."

Cooper—who changed his name legally from Vince Furnier—went into detail for the first time earlier this year in a frank interview with a Christian music magazine, speaking at length about his love for God and reluctance to become a "Christian celebrity."

Seen as having paved the way for the likes of today's outrageous performers such as Marilyn Manson, Cooper maintains that his act was never political or religious and always had "a sense of humor." He told HM: The Hard Music Magazine that he was always insulted whenever he was accused of being satanic. Raised in a Christian home, he still believed in God, although he was not personally committed.

That changed when alcoholism threatened his marriage. He and his wife, Sheryl, attended a church with a "hellfire pastor." Cooper said he became a Christian "initially more out of the fear of God, rather than the love of God. I did not want to go to hell." Now he views his faith as "an ongoing thing," he said. "Being a Christian is something you just progress in. You learn. You go to your Bible studies. You pray."

Cooper has avoided what he calls "celebrity Christianity" because not doing so would make it "really easy to focus on Alice Cooper and not on Christ. I'm a rock singer. I'm nothing more than that. I'm not a philosopher. I consider myself low on the totem pole of knowledgeable Christians. So, don't look

for answers from me.”

Yet he has been able to speak to others in the music scene about his faith. “I’ve had a couple of people that were friends of mine that I’ve talked to that have vocally said they have [accepted Christ]. I have talked to some big stars about this, some really horrific you’d be surprised. The ones that you would think are the furthest gone, are the ones that are more apt to listen.”

Songs on Cooper’s more recent recordings have hinted at his change of heart. He sees his stage persona now as “the prophet of doom,” telling people: “‘Be careful! Satan is not a myth. Don’t sit around pretending like Satan is just a joke.’ I think my job is to warn about Satan.”

He no longer performs any song that promotes promiscuous sex and drinking, even old fan-favorites. “I’m very careful about what the lyrics are. I tried to write songs that were equally as good, only with a better message.”

Cooper told HM he answers his critics: “‘I was one thing at one time, and I’m something new. I’m a new creature now. Don’t judge Alice by what he used to be. Praise God for what I am now.’”

—Andy Butcher