

Introducing The City Harmonic



Hailing from Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, The City Harmonic releases their new six-song EP today with Kingsway. The worshipping foursome is made up of frontman Elias Dummer, drummer Josh Vanderlaan, bassist Eric Fusilier, guitarist Aaron Powell (pictured l to r). According to the band's Facebook page, "The City Harmonic is what happens when you mix nostalgic hymns, brit-rock and that sing-at-the-campfire feeling." The band's lead singer shares his thoughts about God's love and being a worship leader.

The Whole Story

God wants our whole selves. We sing songs about it. We talk about it.

We pray that we'd give God our "all," but yet for many of us in Western culture it seems we're still uncomfortable with the implications. One thing I think we need to do is reshape our thinking to conform to a biblical way of seeing the world. We need to recognize just how much Platonic philosophy (i.e. sensual/emotional: bad; intellectual/"spiritual": good) has shaped the modern Christian worldview. I don't think God looks at the world and sees "spiritual" and "secular." God so loved the world that He came and died through Jesus for it. He has called out the church to do the same thing *for the*

world. The fertile ground for our salvation is not in the afterlife, it's here and now, moment by moment. We may try to compartmentalize our lives and make it easier on ourselves, but it just doesn't work. We either make every effort to worship God in every thought, action, feeling, whatever—or we don't. God made us as thinking creatures, but also as physical creatures and emotional creatures. We must stop trying to reject the physical or the emotional in favor of the intellectual. We have to value the whole, seeing our spirituality as a summary of our lives rather than a part. We have to bend our *whole selves* to give God glory.

In the song, "I Wonder," we kind of go into that a little bit. I talk about how we can see the love of God in all kinds of mysterious ways, but one example is that we see it in our romantic relationships. In the song I use lines like: "I see it in true love; I see it in her eyes" and "the love of God is bigger than my beating heart." If we can't see our most important love relationships as a glimpse of God's love, that's a pretty sad story. So our songs get into theology, of course, but I hope that it's because that truth, that theology, is grounded in our lives and our stories.

Take, as another example, Jesus' response when asked for the greatest commandment in all of Scripture. He answers, "'Love the Lord

Your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments." We hear this all the time, but there are five words in there that I overlooked for a long time: "And the second is like it." In the eyes of God we can't (despite our best efforts) separate our capacity for loving our neighbor from our capacity for loving God—no matter how much so-called religious fervor we muster up. It doesn't matter how many nice songs we sing to God or how many sermons we preach if we can't love and seek to understand the person standing next to us. It's no wonder, then, that we should care about social justice. It's no wonder that we should go and make things right with our brother or sister before we take part in *sharing* the Eucharist—if the thing most like loving God is to love my neighbor, it's a no-brainer. It's not some obscure rule; it just makes sense. The social and relational play an important role in our spirituality.

I believe this presents us with a language problem as worship leaders. There's been this "worship vs. performance" paradigm in the discourse around worship leading for a long time. I think the days of that kind of language are done. It just seems to be yet another way of allowing that

dualistic schism to shape our thinking. If we love God and lovingly serve the people in the room, we serve God. It becomes a question of intent rather than appearance. We might carry out a “performance,” but it’s no more “fake” than a preacher who tells the same joke to a different audience. The joke works and invites people into the experience. It’s not a question of whether someone is “worshipping” or “performing.” It’s a question of whether someone is performing selfishly or selflessly, and the fact is, that it’s almost impossible to judge that as a casual observer. If I don’t get to know someone, how can I know their intent?

The thing is, if we *don’t* “perform” as musicians, i.e. if we don’t recognize the reality of what being on a stage looks and feels like to an audience, I think we run the risk of actually making the obstacle between performer and audience bigger rather than smaller, and ironically, elevating ourselves rather than sharing the moment with the room. You can eliminate the “stage” by turning it around or trying to be as shy as possible, and this can work with great effort, but you can also eliminate the stage for your audience by seeing them eye-to-eye as God-loved human beings who want you to be one too. I personally think people find it easier to forget about the stage when they see a group of people that engage them and share that moment

with them—

including helping them to understand the musical things that might be going on.

We look and pray for that special moment, for God to surprise us, but it's

naive to think that we shouldn't have a well thought-out plan of how to get there.

Sometimes people talk about music, and in particular worship music, as "emotional manipulation," but aside from a harsh choice of

words, I don't believe this is bad. Great stories move us. Great songs move

us. Great art moves us. It's

designed to. Why does the fact that something that might be intentionally

designed to move us certain ways mean that it is inherently bad? Don't you have

to *manipulate* a steering wheel to drive a car? You could use a different

word: inspire, encourage, whatever—but at the end of the day we're talking

about the same thing. You're still doing intentional things to elicit a

specific response. Or, to put it

another way, nobody's disappointed when the roller coaster does what it's supposed

to.

So when we play live, I love enjoying that journey

together eye-to-eye with the room. To me, it's part of a robust and healthy

spirituality that values the whole person before God. We don't need to be

"islands together" in worship; we can share that moment and maybe even aim for

it. Sometimes the plan changes when everybody comes together, but you really have to see the people and seek God to get any sense of what that looks like—some things work every time, some things don't. Nonetheless, some part of what we do is a performance—a thing designed to accomplish a goal. We do that out of love for our neighbor and in worship to God because we're to do *everything* in worship to God.

There's this image from the Beatles' playing "Hey Jude" in the studio that's burned into my mind's eye. There are the four guys doing their thing, but before long the lines between the audience and the performer have just totally dissolved. People are all over the place; somebody's like sitting on the piano or something. It's great. Maybe the reality of playing on a stage, as opposed to a studio set, means that it can't always play out exactly like that, but we'll do our best to make sure it *feels* that way as we all come before God—each of us bringing our whole selves—together.

To learn more and to connect with the band, visit .

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