

Israel Houghton: From Music to Movies

Five-time Grammy Award-winning worship leader Israel Houghton has forged into new territory as a producer of the new film *I'm in Love With a Church Girl*, out on DVD this month. Houghton shares why he wanted this film released, what it says about the church and his future filmmaking plans.

CHARISMA: What made you decide to help produce *I'm in Love With a Church Girl*?

HOUGHTON: The commitment to excellence when I first saw it—how things were edited, how things were shot, how the actors were trained and performed their parts. I was blown away. It's great to get behind a true story and help people experience that on screen. It was also done in a way that doesn't apologize for what we believe, but also we never have to add a disclaimer for a lack of excellence.

CHARISMA: Why was this film so important to release now?

HOUGHTON: There are so many people who look at church and look at Christianity through jaded glasses. I think this story says, "Be careful who you push away. Be careful who you write off. Be careful who you consider disqualified." Because God has a way of putting His hands on those types of people.

If you look at the disciples, none of them were credentialed. If anything, they were a rough group of guys. And God says, "These are the guys I'm going to put My Spirit in. These are the guys I'm going to build My church on."

I think sometimes we pray, "God, send us revival," and God sends us some ragtag people. Then we go and say, "Oh, no, not that kind of revival. More neatly packaged than that." And God says, "No, this is what I'm doing."

This story [shows how God can] take someone who probably had a view of what Christians were supposed to be and take that same guy and now he's pastoring. It's remarkable.

CHARISMA: Do you relate to the lead character at all?

HOUGHTON: To a degree. My struggle has always been very veiled. I've had plenty of people say, "You're not this enough or that enough. It won't work." I just kind of smile and say, "Oh, really?" and just go and do what I've been called to do. So, to that degree, I can relate to that.

CHARISMA: How did you see God's hand in the making of this film?

HOUGHTON: Honestly, if you look at the whole process, this was written [by executive producer Galley Molina while he was in prison], and it was on the silver screen [last year]. That, in and of itself, shows that God's hand is on the whole thing. God is just breathing on the whole thing, intersecting and orchestrating everybody's lives to tell the story. And then along the way, to have gotten involved how I did—that, in and of itself, is Ephesians 3:20: God is at work doing exceedingly above all I could ask or think.

CHARISMA: You didn't just produce the film; you also worked on the soundtrack. Tell us a little about that.

HOUGHTON: The soundtrack includes several new songs I've done as an artist and as a producer, and it has great collaborations with Donnie McClurkin, Marvin Sapp, James Fortune, Lalah Hathaway, Sheila E. I'm really, really happy with the way it turned out.

CHARISMA: Will the songs be on your upcoming album?

HOUGHTON: [They're] on the film's soundtrack. In many ways, this is a new CD for me. Of the 13 or 14 songs, seven or eight are mine. It's basically my new CD coming out.

CHARISMA: What plans do you have for your filmmaking company, Reverence Gospel Media?

HOUGHTON: Currently, we are raising funds for a whole slate of films. And that is actually going really, really well. I know people who are in this process for years and years, and right now we're ready to get started.

There are true stories and stories that just need to be told. The themes will differ a lot for each of the films we put out.

CHARISMA: Will your future films all be faith-based?

HOUGHTON: Oh, definitely. But even "faith-based" has a stigma. We're trying to make competitive Hollywood films that have messages of comfort and redemption.