

Not Your Average Girl Group

THESE THREE SISTERS ARE OFFERING THE KIND OF CUTTING-EDGE, SPIRITUALLY GROUNDED MUSIC THAT HAS EVERYONE DANCING.

The large room in Oklahoma City overflows with women. Some are younger than others as many teens are here with their moms.

All have gathered for one purpose—girl talk with the three women of urban-pop trio Out of Eden. The topics of the evening run the gamut—boys, dating, acceptance, self-image, clothes, purpose, life in general.

Throughout the night, Out of Eden sisters Lisa Kimmey, 28, Andrea Kimmey- Baca, 26, and Danielle Kimmey, 24, offer their insights, share personal experiences and cite Scripture as they answer a whirlwind of questions from fans obviously excited about the opportunity to hear from the veteran musical group. Over a span of 10 years, the sisters have recorded six projects, sold 1.5 million albums, shared the stage with such well-known acts as Destiny's Child, Kirk Franklin and dc Talk, and garnered soundtrack credits on TV shows such as Dawson's Creek.

This "girls night" is one of many the sisters have held during the last three years. Whether it's an Out of Eden This Is Your Life weekend event or a night at the Girls of Grace conferences, the sisters are following what they believe to be a call on their hearts.

"It's so amazing to see all those girls in one place," Danielle said in a recent interview with SpiritLed Woman. "We're so unqualified to be talking to these girls about some of these issues, but God always gives us the words to say. He always brings Scriptures to our minds. Our hearts are for ministering to young girls."

Danielle recalls a conversation she and her sisters had four

years ago with the group's pastor, Tim Johnson, of Bethel World Outreach Center, the church all three attend in Nashville, Tennessee.

"One day our pastor just sat us down and said: 'You've got to have a vision. It's not enough to just make music.'"

So the trio got serious about reaching teens.

Their newest project, Hymns (Gotee), introduces youth to songs that many Out of Eden fans won't know. In arranging them, Lisa married historic words to modern musical styles.

"The words are so dynamic," Danielle says. "I love modern-day worship, but today's Christian music doesn't really bother with using theology and doctrine. The truth in these centuries-old songs from writers who had a deep relationship with God are so relevant for teens today as they face so many issues and hurts."

EMBRACING THE CALL

"Papa was a rolling stone," Lisa says, coining a pop R&B song title. Their parents divorced when Lisa, the oldest of the three, was 5. "We were so young. I don't remember the fighting. I guess you just block some things out."

"Not having a father, we didn't really know who we were because a father defines his kids, especially daughters," Andrea says. "So you start seeking the attention of males. Girls pursuing guys seems to be the trend of our culture these days, and I think that goes back to girls' growing up in broken homes without dads."

"I think that's where so many of these other issues start," Danielle adds. "It's amazing how many girls with so much opportunity come to our concerts, and their focus is so narrow—on guys. We're trying to instill a vision that goes beyond having a boyfriend or being attractive to the opposite sex. We're asking, 'What does God have you on this planet for

right now?'”

Lisa, Andrea and Danielle discovered their spiritual destinies early in life. Their Christian mother earned the family's living as a touring concert pianist.

“Our mom raised us to love and trust God, and at church we learned that with Him our lives had purpose,” Danielle says, while recalling stories of their childhood.

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

Those early moorings sustained the girls when their mother moved the family from Elyria, Ohio, where they had lived in affluence, to Richmond, Virginia, where they lived with their grandfather in a lesser lifestyle than they had known. There the three sisters often walked to the neighborhood church, the site of charismatic, multicultural gatherings.

“Mom was going to college and taking piano lessons,” Lisa explains, “and we were broke all the time. We'd walk to the food bank at church to get free groceries, and we didn't really have clothes.”

Their mother's remarrying when Lisa was 14 and Danielle and Andrea were preteens resulted in their moving to Nashville, where they lived in an inner-city project.

“It was so segregated, and that was culture shock for us,” Andrea says. “We were living between drug dealers, and for the first time in our lives we encountered racism.”

In hindsight, the three realize that both the “silver platter and hard times” of growing up were part of their overall destiny. “That's why I think God fashioned us for what we're doing,” Danielle says. “Because our experiences run the gamut, we're totally able to minister effectively to black kids, white kids, Hispanic, Asian.”

A few years ago, Out of Eden got up close and personal in a

video that the sisters taped to address specific issues teenage girls face.

"We got together and thought, 'If Out of Eden could take a girl out to dinner to talk to her, this is what we would tell her,'" Lisa says. "The whole point of the video is to start dialogue within kids' homes and their youth groups."

It's been three years since the This Is Your Life video released, and the sisters are still getting e-mails offering personal comments about the video's impact. The openness of the e-mails, as well as conversations with teens, have been the most surprising aspects of the sisters' ministry, Danielle says.

"There is such an absence of light in today's world," she explains. "When these girls see any amount of light, they grab on to it. I can't tell you how many girls have come up to us in tears looking for any glimmer of light."

FINDING INSPIRATION

Out of Eden's unique connection with teens is not of their own doing, all three women agree.

"We can't imagine doing a concert or talking one-on-one to these kids without the direction of the Holy Spirit," Danielle says. "That's who we're inspired by."

"There are times, especially on stage, when we feel the Lord leading in a different direction," she adds. "Maybe we've just finished a ballad, which normally we'd follow with an upbeat song like 'Lovely Day,' but instead we hear the Holy Spirit say: 'Slow down. There are people here who are broken.'"

That kind of in-your-face experience happened a year ago when the group found itself face to face with at-risk teens in a Salvation Army girls home. "We had been warned before we went in that these girls were closed and didn't want to hear about God," Andrea says.

As predicted, the teens gave Out of Eden an icy reception. "They looked at us like, 'Who are you, and what do you have to say to me?'" Andrea says.

Instead of performing as planned, Out of Eden sat down with the girls for some real conversation—a decision prompted by the Holy Spirit, Lisa says. "We just talked to them about what music they like, fashion, their favorite movies, then we told them our story."

The day ended with a roomful of teens singing "Amazing Grace." "They were open to hear whatever we had to say about God," Lisa recalls. "It was a total testimony of what God can do no matter what the circumstances. I think as soon as we trust God enough to actually open our mouths and talk to someone, He shows up."

Onstage and off, the sisters exhibit a mature wisdom and sensitivity to the Lord that profoundly impacts teens and adults. No doubt these young women will be making a difference for a long time.

Lindy Warren has covered the Christian music industry for more than 15 years.