

Rebranding Rock? The Battle for the Soul of 'the Devil's Music'

As many American Christians face an increasingly hostile environment in the United States, with some fearing persecution while others argue for a strategic retreat, producer and author Mark Joseph has a different take in his new book, *Rock Gets Religion: The Battle for the Soul of the Devil's Music*.

In this insightful work, Joseph takes readers behind the scenes of pop, rock and hip-hop music to reveal a surprising number of faithful Christians are making music in the mainstream music industry.

For the first time, on a mass scale, rock is both getting religion and understanding that faith in God isn't its enemy, but an important element in creating music that is timeless. But if rock and religion have reached a truce of sorts, it wasn't easy and it wasn't always that way.

Since its inception as a musical genre, rock music faced opposition from some Christian leaders who were deeply suspicious of it and preached against the evils of rock. The rock world responded in kind by often expressing hostility to Christianity and Christian artists who appeared to be serious about those beliefs.

In *Rock Gets Religion*, Joseph explores the tensions caused when religious youth are thrown into the world of rock 'n' roll. He weaves thoughtful commentary amidst the stories of artists who are singing of their faith, like Kendrick Lamar, Chance the Rapper, Justin Bieber, Taylor Swift, The Fray, Mumford & Sons, Twenty One Pilots and many others who are not afraid to weave their faith in God into their music and takes

readers on a fascinating journey to the crossroads where rock and religion intersect.

According to Joseph, four factors have caused this to happen: First, many Christian music stars who were in CCM (Contemporary Christian music) have left their CCM labels and signed with mainstream ones. Next, young Christians avoided CCM altogether and signed directly to mainstream labels. Then, rock stars who experienced conversions stayed in mainstream music instead of leaving their former fans behind and joining the Christian music world. Finally, the *American Idol* phenomenon caused dozens of young Christians with musical talent to bypass the music industry altogether and be “discovered” not by secular Hollywood music executives but by the American people who voted them in. Together, these four changes in pop culture have caused a flood of Christian artists to come into the mainstream music industry. The phenomenon is so pervasive that many Americans don’t even realize that that song they hear at the gym or at their favorite coffee shop is sung by an artist who is a devout Christian.

Mark Joseph began writing about the topic in 1994 in a series of articles published in publications such as *World*, *Regeneration Quarterly*, *CCM*, *Christianity Today* and *Billboard Magazine*, culminating in his first book, which was released in 1999, entitled *The Rock & Roll Rebellion: Why People of Faith Abandoned Rock Music and Why They’re Coming Back*, followed by a second book, *Faith, God & Rock ‘n Roll*, in 2003.

Now, some 15 years later, he has returned with this third and final book in a rock and faith trilogy that examines the acceleration of the trend that he first spotted 20 years ago.

But LA-based Joseph didn’t just spot the trend, he also helped it along, one of a handful of other authors like Charlie Peacock and Steve Turner, who worked to create a framework in

order to help artists gain access to the mainstream music world.

Joseph himself released over a hundred albums by CCM artists into the mainstream market overseas and, in 2004, he also produced the rock soundtrack for Mel Gibson's groundbreaking film *The Passion of The Christ*, which found the author and producer working with some of rock, pop, country and R&B's biggest artists, like Lauryn Hill, Brad Paisley, BeBe Winans and members of bands like Creed, Blink-182 and others, and the author went on to produce tracks for the likes of Dave Mustaine of Megadeth, Andraé Crouch, B.J. Thomas and others.

Naturally, many Christians are asking if this mixing of Christianity and rock music is good for the faith, while some in the rock world wonder the same thing, lamenting the fact that so many popular songs are about faith. In a chapter titled "Relationship Status: Complicated," Joseph tackles the issue head-on, chronicling the stories of artists like Katy Perry, Miley Cyrus and Kings of Leon whose faith has wavered and in some cases disappeared as a result of their superstardom.

But other stories have happier endings as Joseph delves into the stories of artists like Switchfoot, ., Twenty One Pilots and dozens of others who have managed to keep their faith vibrant and keep a message of faith in their music.

Still, Joseph laments the fact that for nearly 40 years, talented Christian artists were never allowed to sing outside of the limited confines of CCM, resulting in a rock and pop music culture that was largely devoid of spiritual content for much of the 1960's, 70's, 80's and 90's, an opinion shared by at least one of the founding fathers of Christian music, Tommy Coomes of the band Love Song, who also ran CCM label Maranatha! Music.

"Rock, pop, and rap now have a growing number of artists who

make compelling and thoughtful music that doesn't leave faith at the door," noted Coomes. "In ways that challenge me deeply, Mark Joseph shakes up the philosophical foundations of the notion of separation of music and faith with the third volume of his rock trilogy, making a strong case to reenter the world of rock with great music and a compelling story of faith."

One of CCM's most respected artists, Phil Keaggy, concurs, adding: "Mark Joseph's research into the lives and accomplishments of artists reveals some very poignant discoveries, such as the roots of faith and the diverse detours that lie ahead for those pursuing their dreams. We are spiritual beings, and what and who we worship must come out into the open eventually. I am thankful that God our Creator cannot be boxed in or limited because of tradition and status, or the approval of a few."

Alice Cooper, who wrote the foreword for Joseph's latest book, said, "Rock has always had religion. After all, it started as gospel music. Elvis Presley knew every gospel song ever made. I'm not an alarmist or nihilist, but the world gets more dangerous every day. I think our natural survival instinct makes us question where we stand with God even if some claim atheism. Mark Joseph's *Rock Gets Religion* is a great read and may answer some of your deep dark questions. Enjoy Mark's book. Read on and rock on!"

Praise for this excellent book has come the lead singers of powerhouse bands like Megadeth, Kansas, Van Halen, Extreme, Creed and Stryper, the band that managed to have a profound Christian presence in mainstream music.

"Music is a powerful tool to touch hearts and change lives," said Stryper singer Michael Sweet. "Add to that the power of rock and it is a force unlike any other. I've known Mark since 1985 and have seen his passion and knowledge firsthand and it's been inspiring to say the least. Together, we've seen what happens when rock and religion collide, and it's been

nothing short of miraculous. Mark's new book *Rock Gets Religion* is a firsthand look at the power of music and the effect it can have on a dark and desperate world when it delivers a message of hope, love grace and peace."

Former Kansas singer, John Elefante, added, "*Rock Gets Religion* is a long overdue and brilliantly written book about art that expresses relationships not just with a higher power but in many cases with Jesus Christ," adding "Mark Joseph has written a must-read book that brings to light the kind of music that has been etched forever in time."

Rock Gets Religion, published by BP books was released on February 13th and is available nationwide. Joseph has been supporting the book's release with interviews in media outlets across the country and has been appearing at book release parties held in Nashville, Los Angeles and Orange County, CA.

Joseph is an American multimedia producer, author, and founder/CEO of MJM Entertainment Group and Bully! Pulpit. He lives in the Los Angeles area with his wife and children. Joseph was born in Tokyo, Japan to missionary parents, Kenny and Lila Joseph, and after graduating from the Christian Academy in Japan in 1986 moved to Los Angeles to attend Biola University, graduating with a bachelor's degree in communication in 1990.

He is an award-winning music and film producer, columnist and author. His books include *Faith, God & Rock 'n' Roll*, and *The Lion, The Professor & The Movies: Narnia's Journey To The Big Screen*. He is a regular contributor to *USA Today*, *The Huffington Post* and has contributed to a variety of publications including *Billboard*, *Beliefnet*, *The Jewish Press*, *World*, *RQ*, *Fox*, *NRO* and others.

He has also worked extensively as a TV host and producer, having anchored *The Entertainment Report* for Group W/CNN, then spending five years as host and producer of NHK TV's *The*

Interview, an international talk show that featured Joseph interviewing public figures like Jay Leno, Larry King, Charlton Heston, George Gallup, Gloria Allred and others. Mr. Joseph also spent a decade as U.S. correspondent for two radio stations, Tokyo FM and FM Yokohama, for whom he reported daily from Los Angeles. {eo}

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