

Soul Sisters

Move over, Destiny's Child. The girls from Out of Eden, raised by a single mom, are calling teens to purity and true destiny in Christ.

"Out of Eden was one of the main things that helped me choose to follow God's path." Web posts like this one about musical sisters Lisa Kimmey, 26; Andrea Kimmey Baca, 24; and Danielle Kimmey, 22, are more the norm than the exception. On cybersites where fans of the urban-pop group participate in message boards, discussion ranges from favorite Out of Eden songs to the music's influence on faith.

The posts are a good measuring stick for the three siblings, who seem to care more about the people listening to their music than the music itself.

"We continually ask ourselves, 'Are the messages in our songs getting through to people, especially to teens?'" Danielle said during a recent interview with Charisma. She was recalling a conversation she and her sisters had had 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—who during Out of Eden's seven-year span as a group have seen major career success that has included 1 million albums sold, more than 15 Christian-radio hit songs and crusade appearances with Billy Graham—got serious about reaching teens.

For their most recent album, *This Is Your Life*, the young women went to youth pastors, leaders of inner-city ministries and parents, asking: “What are your kids dealing with? What could we say to help motivate your kids to change?”

The list was long—self-image, dating, acceptance, lack of purpose, broken homes, abuse—but not surprising.

“We’re seeing so many kids that are getting into abusive relationships with their boyfriends or are even abusing themselves because of insecurity,” Lisa says, noting that most of the teens they talk with have grown up in church.

“I think God is really taking the blanket off a lot of things because the church needs a lot of healing,” Danielle says. “In a lot of ways, Christians’ lives are mirroring the world more and more. The trend is to blend in more. When Christians are watching the same things as non-Christians, you begin to be subjected to that same sort of spirit.”

Andrea adds, “There are more broken homes now, and as a result kids are growing up faster.” That fact, in particular, the sisters know well.

Embracing Destiny

“Papa was a rolling stone,” Lisa says, coining a pop-R&B song title to sum up their absentee father. The siblings’ 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.”

Although Out of Eden is candid about their family’s past—presenting it straightforwardly in their lyrics for anyone to hear—the sisters have seen life from both affluent suburbs and inner-city projects and as a result are more interested in talking with teens about the overarching issue of destiny.

“I think that’s where so many of these other issues start,” Danielle asserts. “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?’”

Andrea adds: “A lot of kids have never been told they’re worth anything, that they have a reason for being here. You can go up to people and tell them they have a destiny, and they’re shocked.”

Lisa, Andrea and Danielle discovered their spiritual destinies early in life, while being supported by a Christian mother who earned the family’s living as a touring concert pianist.

“Our mom raised us to trust God, and at church we learned that with Him our lives had purpose,” Danielle says, while

recalling stories of their childhood.

“One night, our mom let us watch an episode of Fresh Prince—which was unheard of in our house because we weren’t allowed to watch much TV. In the show, someone slept with a girl outside of marriage. After it, our mom sat us down and said: ‘All right, I let you watch this, so we’re going to talk about it. What happened in that show was absolutely wrong. That’s not what we believe. We are separate from that.’”

Learning From Experience

Those early moorings sustained Out of Eden in the years to come as their mother moved the family from Elyria, Ohio, where they had lived in affluence, to Richmond, Virginia, where they lived with their grandfather in more modest surroundings. 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 remarriage took them to Nashville where they lived in an inner-city project when Lisa was 14, and Danielle and Andrea were preteens.

“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.”

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. "We're able to minister effectively to black kids, white kids, Hispanic, Asian."

Dialogue and Inspiration

Out of Eden recently got up-close and personal in a video that the sisters taped to address issues today's 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 in kids' homes and their youth groups."

The six-part video series, titled after their latest album, covers six critical areas for teens: destiny and purpose, security and acceptance, dating and sexual purity, modesty and fashion, security and acceptance, and parental relationships and abuse. Realizing they're far from having all the answers, Out of Eden enlisted experts as well as their friends to address each subject.

The group brought in professional counselors to talk about abuse. For the dating section, the women asked their male friends, including dc Talk's Toby McKeehan, to offer their perspectives on godly relationships. Also featured are Out of Eden's pastor as well as Christian music artist Stacie Orrico, who talks with her dad about parental relationships.

"We all remember the struggles of junior high and high school, what we wished somebody would have said to us," Danielle says. "So in this video, we get to say these things to hopefully thousands of girls."

Out of Eden's unique connection with teens is not of their own

doing, all three women say emphatically.

“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.

Danielle chimes in: “They were pretty much saying, ‘You’re going to fail, but we thought we’d bring you here anyway.’”

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 the planned concert, however, 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” together.

“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.”

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