

Aaron Shust Surrenders All in Latest Release

Headlining An Evening at The Cove on Sunday, Aaron Shust is no stranger to the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Back in 2008, he led worship at the Will Graham Celebration in Burleson, Texas. He also spent time at The Cove in personal reflection while he was on staff at Perimeter Church in Atlanta.

But it was his encounter with Billy Graham in his hometown that stands out in Shust's mind. "Billy came and did a crusade in Pittsburgh when I was a kid," he recalls. "I got to sing in the choir, and sit in the third base section of the stadium learning the songs for those couple of weeks. His preaching has always been so simple and straightforward—and undeniably beautiful."

Shust's childhood was significant in two respects. He accepted Christ at the age of 4, and then started playing piano at the age of 7. As a teenager, he added guitar to his repertoire, influenced by the sounds of the '60s and Motown.

While attending Toccoa Falls College, he studied music theory and developed an aptitude for the likes of Bach and Mozart, as well as Bob Marley and U2. Shust honed his stage skills on campus and while performing in churches and coffeehouses.

All the hard work and preparation paid off. His song "My Savior, My God" took radio by storm, topping six different charts at once while on its way to becoming the most played song of 2006 on the Christian Adult Contemporary charts.

"My Savior, My God" earned Shust a trio of Dove Awards for "Song of the Year," "Songwriter of the Year" and "New Artist of the Year." Other hits followed, including "To God Alone" and "Give Me Words to Speak."

Inspired by the Master Songwriter

So where does Shust get so many great song ideas? You guessed it—he is most inspired by the Master songwriter himself. “If I want good, pure worship music to come out of me, I need to be filling myself with truth. Listening to other worship songs helps stylistically with the music. I think, ‘Do I want to head this direction?’ But if I listen to a steady diet of Phil Collins, I am going to sound like Phil Collins.”

More importantly and obviously, says Shust, “I need to fill myself with the Word of God, which is absolute truth; it’s inerrant. As Chris Tomlin has said, there are songs throughout the Bible. They are in the Psalms obviously, but there are so many songs of praise hidden throughout Scripture, especially in the Old Testament. You’re reading along and all of a sudden, King Nebuchadnezzar breaks into song at one point.”

Looking back into the Word of God offers glimpses of incredible worship songs that already exist. “Sometimes,” Shust adds, “I try to use them verbatim; they are just so perfect the way they are. But then other times, I try to word a song to give a fresh perspective on truth.”

Since those early days in Pittsburgh and then Georgia, Shust has grown professionally and personally. Even now, God is showing him fresh insights, especially in his role as a father to two little boys. “I know God loves me, but I still have my doubts about this when I act unbecomingly. Becoming a dad has changed my perspective. Nothing my kids do will make me love them less. If I can say this as a wicked father, how much more does a heavenly Father love me? Nothing I can do will change that.”

God also teaches Shust valuable lessons through his work. While writing for his last album, *Take Over*, for example, Shust gained fresh insights into submission. “It was a theme that was my heart during the writing season. I actually didn’t realize it until writing was over. I looked over the lyrics

while trying to come up with a title. I realized this album was all about submission. It's all about Romans 12:1-2—offering our bodies as living sacrifices—it's about surrender. I think that the theme of dying to self is important to all of us as believers everyday."

A Night of Worship

What can The Cove audience expect on Sunday? Shust feels it is his job is to play audience favorites. "When I go do a concert, I can't just cover my favorite worship songs and the hymns that I enjoy; the ones I believe take you into worship. What God put it my heart to do is to lead people in worship, not just sing a bunch of songs and entertain them, but to allow them to engage.

"So I am challenged to write songs that allow the audience to engage in worship, and then stick with those songs during concert time and make it easy for the congregation, the audience to engage. We put lyrics up on the screen. I fashion it like I fashion a worship set at church."

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