

# A Radical New Sound

Pop rockers Sixpence None the Richer never felt called to be evangelists in the traditional sense, although all the band members are Christians. Their songs are about the stuff of life—family and romantic relationships, dealing with disappointment, the struggles of being an idealist in a pragmatic world—and their lyrics read more like poetry than a sermon outline.

After years of exhaustive touring and hard work, Sixpence finally scored a hit with “Kiss Me,” a whimsical pop tune that became a No. 1 radio hit in 12 countries. Riding the wave of mainstream success that followed, Sixpence has been invited to play the song on numerous national stages, including *Late Show With David Letterman*.

Since Letterman rarely interacts with his musical guests beyond a handshake after their performances, lead singer Leigh Nash was visibly surprised when the talk-show host invited her to join him for a nationally televised conversation on the guest couch, asking her first about the band’s unusual name.

Nash explained that the name came from C.S. Lewis’ *Mere Christianity*. “A little boy asks his father [for] a sixpence, which is a very small amount of English currency,” she said, “to go and get a gift for his father, and then the father gladly accepts the gift. He’s really happy with it, but he also realizes that he’s not any richer for the transaction because he gave his son the money in the first place.”

Letterman was listening. “He bought his own gift,” he said.

“That’s right. Pretty much,” Nash answered. “I’m sure it meant a lot to him, but he’s really no richer. C.S. Lewis was comparing that to his belief that God has given him and us the gifts that we possess, and to serve Him the way we should, we should do it humbly, realizing how we got the gifts in the

first place.”

By doing her job—simply making excellent music—Nash had earned the right to speak truth to an audience of millions. <P >

### **Across the Great Divide**

Thanks in part to the mainstream success of Sixpence, as well as hardcore group . (Payable On Death)—who regularly share the love of Christ while performing alongside secular (and occasionally anti-God) bands like Korn and Limp Bizkit—the line that has long separated Christian and secular music is beginning to blur.

Sixpence and . have paved the way, showing mainstream culture that Christian artists can make good music and can speak without preaching or condemning. The door is now wide open for a groundswell of Christian musicians to follow their lead and reach outside the church with their songs to be influential where modern culture is shaped—in television, music and politics.

However, such a task is easier said than done.

Sixpence rode the wave of “Kiss Me” to international acclaim and followed that song with a second bonafide hit, “There She Goes.” . had “Southtown,” which received heavy airplay on MTV, and “Rock the Party.”

Yet there are many emerging Christian artists whose intent is to reach mainstream culture but who lack the radio hits or marketing dollars to break through and obtain national platforms like Letterman’s show. The question before them is how to capitalize on the open door that now exists to reach mainstream culture. They can find audiences in churches and youth groups, but gigs are far harder to come by when they step out of the Christian subculture.

How then can they reach unsaved audiences with their music?

Many of these groups are beginning to embrace nontraditional models of ministry to gain platforms from which to share the gospel. Their focus is not only to make music for the church, but also to make music that will gain acceptance beyond its walls.

With a sound that's identifiably outside of the contemporary Christian template, they are creating a cross-cultural appeal for a music that is Christian in nature yet just as likely to be appreciated by an unchurched music devotee as a student at a Christian university. And as the dividing lines between secular and Christian audiences disappear, people are encountering Jesus.

One group that has earned respect from non-Christian and Christian listeners alike is rock-acoustic-jam band Waterdeep. While the band works hard playing secular venues, it is at the same time laying a foundation for what some church leaders are calling "a new paradigm" in Christian missions.

Formed in 1995 and now signed to Squint Entertainment—also the label home for Sixpence None the Richer—the five-member band performs 150 concerts a year, primarily to college-age crowds. The group has a strong Christian following, but lead singer Don Chaffer would like to break beyond that limitation. He believes Waterdeep has a dual calling, though he still is forming his belief about what that purpose is.

"We have a calling within the church and also outside the walls of the church," he says. "We have a calling to lead people in worship within the church walls and present to them the heart of God."

And for the world?

"That's something I'm still trying to piece together," he admits. "On a very intuitive level, I feel like we are called to make great art. The effect of that in the world I know, in part, is to stir people's hearts up. I think there's something

about image-making and art-making that is capable of carrying a prophetic message in a way few other things can.”

Waterdeep is realistic about the difficulty of its mission. In spite of the band’s burden to reach outside Christian circles with their music, Chaffer knows that getting into those venues and paying the dues necessary to have any level of success is a hard path to take.

The main barrier? Simply making a living.

“In the bar circuit, for example, you have to take 50 bucks and all the beer you can drink as [payment for a show],” he says. “Since most Christians aren’t alcoholics, the free drinks don’t matter, and 50 bucks doesn’t pay for your room.

“You’re stuck with this reality that you’ve got cushy gigs you can get through the church—and make a living—or you’ve got nothing you can make in the world without paying severe dues. Particularly for those of us who are married with families, or have any kind of staff we’re trying to support, it’s just not possible to take that dive.”

For groups like Waterdeep, the answer to reaching the bars, the unchurched or the people who’d never darken the doors of a church may actually be found within the church. <P> **From Shifting Sand to Solid Rock**

Chaffer is one of many proponents of an emerging and completely new model for modern music-ministry: one in which the church totally subsidizes artists so they are able to pursue their craft full time.

Far from a “free ticket” for musicians, the concept allows churches to support artists much like they do missionaries who are being sent into another culture to spread the gospel. Such backing allows those artists the freedom to spend time honing their craft and playing for people who might never hear any other form of the Christian message.

“If the church were to say, ‘All right, we’re going to give you this money to live on so you can get off the road enough to be creative, to make music that’s going to apply..., then there’d be a fighting chance,” Chaffer says.

Some believe such an arrangement also would tear down the current notion in the Nashville music industry that says Christian artists are celebrities who should be idolized like rock-or pop-music stars. Instead, it would introduce the artists essentially as church-backed music missionaries.

It’s an idea whose time has come, says Tom Rozof, Waterdeep’s pastor and pastor of the Wichita (Kansas) Vineyard.

“The church has lost this perspective,” he says. “Rather than looking at bands as instruments of mission, [Christians] use and often abuse the bands to serve their own ends. They want them to come in, give a great concert, be models for their kids, help them do evangelism on that night—and often they are disappointed if the band cannot do this for free.”

The Wichita Vineyard has partnered with Waterdeep to carve a new path in which the church and a Christian artist can unite in the common goal of getting the Christian message outside the church walls. At the Wichita Vineyard, the church provides office space for Waterdeep’s volunteer and paid support staff, a growing team of intercessors who keep the band covered in prayer daily, financial consultation from members of the church’s financial advisory board, and occasional financial assistance for special needs.

Rozof also provides spiritual oversight and assists with decision-making as needed.

“I feel my chief role is to see that the entire band maintains a close walk with their Lord,” he says. “I also want to help them preserve healthy inter-band relationships while perfecting their creative and musical skills, and to assure they are learning how to better minister both to the lost, as

well as to believers, when on the road.”

Perhaps the most important and most unique piece in this arrangement has been the establishing of a fund dedicated to the ongoing support of the band. The fund is a nonprofit, tax-deductible branch of the church dedicated to raising additional monetary support to help the band keep ministry at the heart of their mission.

Rozof believes churches need to change the way they treat music artists, and this nonprofit arm is designed to help expand the effect of Waterdeep’s ministry.

“My goal is to have Waterdeep’s support so firm that they can minister six months on and six months off,” Rozof says. “I also want to find ways of using ministry teams from our church who will go out with the band on the road, in the same way that Jesus sent out His disciples.” <P> **Takin’ It to the Streets**

Halfway across the country, playing both a style of music and a list of venues altogether different from Waterdeep’s, Philadelphia-based hip-hop group Cross Movement is finding the same thing to be true for them—they need this new paradigm in ministry in which secularly focused groups are backed by a nonprofit ministry.

Cross Movement experienced breakthrough success last year with their album House of Representatives, which combined profound, direct, spiritual lyrics with music that didn’t take a back seat to any secular artist. Their music video landed in regular rotation on BET’s Rap City, as well as in other national mainstream video outlets.

The high level of national secular exposure opened a lot of ministry opportunities for Cross Movement, but it actually showed the group firsthand their need for church support. To meet the need, they set up a nonprofit arm—Cross Movement Ministries—which enables them to spend more time actively

touching lives in their community.

Their album draws the crowds, and then through the financial backing of Cross Movement Ministries, the group puts on conferences, workshops, evangelistic events and tours aimed at reaching the inner city. Where possible, the band makes all these events free to the public, which is why setting up the ministry support was vital.

“Ministers and ministries, missionaries—they get supported to do the work of the Lord, and we counted ourselves no different than any other minister or ministry,” Cross Movement’s John Wells says. “These inner-city kids we end up dealing with are poor, barely able to afford whatever. We just couldn’t see them coming to our concerts and paying all this money just to hear the gospel.”

Because Cross Movement makes music that’s good enough to get radio and TV airplay, they’re able to draw crowds. They then use that platform to target audiences that other ministries would never be able to reach—which is why one of the group’s larger ministry goals is to be able to spend time in inner cities hosting evangelistic crusades.

“We’ll come into a town and gear [it] more toward those people who never come out to other crusades,” Wells says. “Something that has our flavor to it—hip-hop, maybe R&B want to get into crusades to reach the inner city.”

### **Making Cultural Re-Entry Possible**

Backing this new breed of artists in their attempts to reach outside the walls of the church will require much more financial sacrifice, say those on the cusp of turning such ministry into reality.

Waterdeep’s Chaffer believes the charismatic church, in particular, has the most potential to bring about the change needed to support such ministries. The reason? Strong teaching of God’s principles found in charismatic theology.

"The idea that the kingdom of God is a different paradigm than the world is strongly taught in the charismatic church," Chaffer says. "That is going to be the motivating factor for the church re-entering the arts. It's only the people who give their money, support, energy and time to something for the kingdom's sake who are going to be able to tip the scales financially to make that possible."

He says that for most Christian artists who are in a position to influence their culture for Christ there just isn't enough money to allow them the luxury of taking the time and the risks needed to be accepted in the world.

If Christians actively begin to support these musicians—even if they don't enjoy or understand the musical style—the world will be changed, Chaffer believes.

"The church would find herself in the position of having people get saved and having to deal with the wreckage of lives that have been spent in the world," he says. "Also, it would bring more lost people to a place of respecting the church as relevant to their lives and considering the possibility that facing Christ might be something which could alleviate the gnawing hunger they feel in their souls."

The Christian musicians emerging in the secular realm today are infiltrating that world system for Christ—by using one of the most powerful and influential forms of communication in society. They carry a visionary desire to penetrate mainstream culture, perform their art and be living examples of Christ—without compromising their own cultural relevance to suit the acceptable or traditional tastes of the church.

As they do, they just dare to believe that whether their route leads to the spotlights of national television or to the house lights of a college bar, lives will be changed for Christ.

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## The Crossover Controversy

‘Crossover’ critics say Christian artists have no business in show business, but Christians succeeding in pop culture say God is opening doors for the gospel. Who’s right?

For the last quarter century or so, the church hasn’t quite known what to do with the arts. There has been a line in the sand: On one side, everything that was created for expressly religious purposes; on the other, everything else. As a result, the church hasn’t known what to do with popular music, in particular.

Despite the acceptance recently of some Christian artists by mainstream audiences, many critics say Christians have no place in worldly venues, that artists who have “crossed over” have done so at the expense of the gospel message. They believe Christians should only make art that is either strongly evangelistic or aimed at the church.

Veteran recording artist Steve Camp questions the motives of Christians who make music for the mainstream that has little overtly Christian lyrical content.

“Why not be honest?” Camp asks. “Why not say: ‘I recorded a pop song. I did it for myself to make money.’ If you’re going to make a song for the general marketplace, give it biblical content. I think [crossover artists] are making pop music and career decisions apart from the gospel.”

Steven Isaac, associate editor of *Plugged In*, a magazine about music, media and culture published by Focus on the Family, believes Christian artists have a duty to express Christian

tenets in their music.

“If a Christian artist is going to use Christ’s name to market their music, then I feel that they have an obligation to use Christian ideology in their music,” he says. “If they feel that their calling is to simply express their life in music, then they need to stop marketing themselves as a Christian band.”

Others, however, believe God can reveal Himself in a variety of ways, some of which may not include an overt expression of faith.

Tom Rozof is pastor of the Wichita Vineyard church in Wichita, Kansas, and has been in ministry since the early days of the Jesus Movement in 1971. He represents a new mold of ministers who are actively supporting and nurturing artists who believe they are called beyond the safe confines of the church.

“We should support both the ‘Christian’ and the ‘artist’ that is contained in the label ‘Christian artist,’” he says. “We need a new breed of pastors who are not afraid of the art side of Christian artists.”

Rozof thinks God can be revealed in ways other than outlining the plan of salvation in every song. Even when Christian artists aren’t overtly witnessing through their lyrics, he says, they are still pointing people to Christ.

“It has always interested me that God has never written anywhere on the landscape of the world He created a direct reference to Himself,” Rozof says. “He could have left us some kind of obvious monument that pointed to His divine nature and likeness.

“Instead He left us His creative work, trusting that His art would speak to us in ways that not even the Bible would be able to match. The Bible tells us in Romans 1 that this art speaks.”

Rozof believes that most of the church today does little to penetrate culture with “the wonder and beauty that we associate with God.”

“We are so afraid that people in the church might say to us, ‘Why, that’s not Christian!’ We just don’t have the courage anymore to stand up to the pharisees who head up so many of our religious institutions, and like Jesus, say to them: ‘The Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath, and I’m going to live and act in accordance with that truth.’”

Rozof believes the opportunity for Christian artists to influence society is wide open.

“The general pop-music audience is sheep—they are led by all kinds of things,” he says. “But they have an uncanny nose for truth communicated in unique and genuinely creative ways. The most important factor is not whether an artist has explicit Christian lyrics, but whether that artist is a ‘living lyric’ in the same way that the apostle Paul called each of us to be a ‘living letter from Christ.’

“If we live our faith and present our art, we will be listened to.”