

Cruses launch worship school

Its three-year program, which begins next month, offers college-style major in worship and musicianship

A new school designed to train and graduate worship leaders and Christian musicians is scheduled to begin classes next month in Austin, Texas, the “live music capital of the world.”

Institute for the Arts (IFTA), with the motto “Coupling Excellence and the Anointing,” is being launched by husband-wife team Joe and Becky Cruse, worship leaders for evangelist Rodney Howard-Browne’s ministry from 1995- 1999 and full-time music ministers for more than 30 years.

“There is a need for excellence in the local church, and there is also a need to be in the flow,” said Becky, a classically trained pianist. “We want a good mix of the two: excellence and anointing, Spirit and truth, Word and Spirit—a blending of those two components to make a well-grounded worship leader or musician.”

While serving as music pastor at Church on the Rock in Rockwall, Texas, from 1990-1995, Joe said God began to speak to him about training young people in specific areas of the arts. “There are some great people who are probably more qualified to do this than we are, but I really believe the Lord has put a call on our lives and an anointing to do this,” he said.

Nearly every week, the Cruses receive calls from churches looking for worship leaders. According to Joe, pastors feel that there’s a tremendous need for IFTA. “Every pastor I’ve talked to has said: ‘Hurry. Yesterday was too late.’”

IFTA offers a three-year program. Each year is divided into four, eight-week sessions. The last half of the third year, students will intern at a local church or in an industry setting. "If everything meshes, that will be their home," Joe noted.

Classes will convene four nights a week, enabling students to hold daytime jobs. There will be private instruction for piano and instruments. Joe and Becky will serve as the primary worship, vocal and keyboard instructors.

Throughout the year, guest musicians, worship leaders and evangelists will be invited to teach. IFTA students will have the opportunity to practice their skills at City Worship Centre, the Austin church the Cruses established last September. In addition to their music education, students will graduate with two years of Bible as a minor.

IFTA is accredited through Life Christian University and Accrediting Commission International. To keep down costs, the school has not sought regional accreditation that leads to qualification for government-guaranteed student loans. Annual tuition is \$2,250, and a monthly payment plan is available.

To date, the school has received nearly 70 applications, the majority of which are from 18- to 22-year-olds from charismatic, full-gospel backgrounds. The school is open to people of all ages and denominations.

The Cruses said they are looking, in particular, for those who have a gift and a call and need to learn the essentials, such as how to write a chart, how to run a band rehearsal, how to put together a CD project. "They just need someone with them

on a daily basis for about three years to show them how to do it," Becky explained, adding that "the truth is taught; the Spirit or anointing is caught."

The Cruses hope the school will have an impact on smaller churches. "It's a shame that you have to have a church of 10,000 before you can have excellence," Joe said. "Somehow, we have to establish and equip the next generation and be a resource for the smaller churches."

In their new hometown of Austin, Becky said she sometimes hears a musician and thinks: There is a potential music leader that the church lost.

"I believe the world has a lot of our great worship leaders, and it's time to get them back and let them know there is a place for them," she said.

Eventually, the Cruses hope to add a theater, soundstage, studios and dorms.

"We're faith people, and we're taking a step of faith," Joe said. "I know the Lord does not give you visions and dreams for them not to be fulfilled. We pray like it all depends on God, and then we work like it all depends on us."

Carol Chapman Stertzer

For more information about IFTA, call (866) 347-0576; or visit

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