

Experience as Worship Leader Prepared Chicago Musician for CD

Jaime Navarro has been a Worship Leader and the Adult Choir Director at New Life Covenant Church in Chicago for the past 5 years. He is frequently invited to minister at churches through word and song.

He recently released the single, *As I Am* on Reverbnation. The single is from his upcoming CD, *The Book of .*, which is being produced by Antoinio Daniels of Tone Soundz Music Media record label and Rick Rivera. The CD in its entirety is expected to become available later this summer.

Q. Tell us about your musical background.

Navarro: I've been singing since I was 13 years old. I started off with an R&B acapella group called 4X's Fresh and we were basically a Boyz II Men prodigy group. We did local neighborhood gigs, block parties, talent shows and birthdays. We sang together for about 4 years and eventually got signed to a minor record label but nothing ever came out of it. I eventually branched off into my own thing and ended up recording a single in 1999. It was a salsa remake of the Lionel Richie original *Hello*. It was titled *Ven A Mi*. We did a lot of major shows in the Midwest, opening up for any salsa artist that would come into town. The single helped us get noticed by Sony Tropical in Miami and we were on the brink of getting signed to a major deal before it fell through. I eventually moved to Miami to continue my career but ended up just doing studio work and writing songs for *Crescent Moon* (Emilio & Gloria Estefan's label) and in 2001 moved back home to Chicago. In 2003, my wife (then girlfriend) asked me to go to church with her and I gave my life to Christ. I've been

singing and ministering for the Lord ever since.

Q. What is the story behind your new single “As I Am”?

Navarro: The story behind the single is brokenness. I wrote the song about 2 years ago when I was going through a real rough time personally and in ministry as well. I was at a place in my walk where I was doing “church” but felt disconnected from God. It was actually a question I asked God one day at work. I simply asked Him, “Do you receive me? Will you take me ‘As I Am’?” And the answer from Him was, “Absolutely. Yes!” So, simply put, it came from a place of total brokenness.

Q. What brought about the production of your upcoming CD *The Book of .?*

Navarro: I would have to say my testimony. In 1993, I was shot and left for dead. It was a drive by shooting/gang initiation and I was shot in my back, right near my spine. I lost my right kidney, half of my liver and my diaphragm was reconstructed. I had to learn how to walk again and went through 6 months of intense physical therapy. So, when I came to the Lord in 2003 I began to realize that the sparing of my life was God’s way of arming me with a story that would capture people’s attention; Giving me an opportunity to minister and tell them about the Man who saved my life . . . Jesus!

Q. How does your personal testimony play a vital role in your CD?

Navarro: It’s what I stand on. It’s the evidence of the power of Christ at work in my life even when I wasn’t looking for Him. It’s the backdrop for this entire project. Not only for me but for everyone vested in this enormous effort. They all know my story and they all know that it was nothing . . . BUT GOD!

Q. In what ways has being a worship leader prepared you for the release of your solo work?

Navarro: My discipleship in leading worship was very special and still is to this day. My mentor and Worship Pastor Elizabeth De Jesus basically spoon fed me for about 3 years before releasing me to lead worship. I sang with the church choir and was poured into continually about how singing and worship are not the same thing, which is something I think many worship leaders today can't separate. That one-on-one with someone (who in my opinion is the greatest worship leader), solidified the understanding of Biblical worship and the power of the gift of worship. It prepared me for the greater call of taking worship 'to the nations'. I understand worship; It's my life and not my voice. I know that it's never about me and always about Him. It taught me about humility in the presence of God and how to handle 'the heart' of God.

Q. What is your understanding of worship and praise?

Navarro: Whenever I respond to this question, I prefer to use Biblical precedence as opposed to personal opinion. In Exodus 9:1, the Bible says that Moses said to Pharaoh, "Let my people go; that they may worship me". Worship in my life is my response to God for the freedom He has given me. In other words, I look at it as a conditional release from my Egypt. He let me go (his part); I have to worship (my part). I feel like worship is not an option in my life or in the life of any believer. It's a commission on all of us! It's a command and a mission to make Him known in our praise.

Q. How do you envision the role of music ministry?

Navarro: Music has the power to change people, to change the way they feel and the way they think. It can make you happy or sad, it can make you dance or depressed. The church has a great call to harness that power and use it to refocus individuals on Christ and not on us or how we feel. In most

churches, music or worship ministry is the very first thing you see when you enter the doors. It has the power to draw or push away. There is a fine line between God-music and good music. We're called to manifest God-music and not entertain. That right there is what I think most churches today are struggling with.

Q. Is there a place for the Christian musician in the secular arena?

Navarro: I have to say, yes, simply because the secular arena has somehow made its way into the church. So, why not take the church into the secular arena? There are different ways to do it though. It has to be strategic yet not watered down. Those that are called to this have to be very grounded and mature followers of Christ. They have to change that world as opposed to letting that world change them. That takes a special anointing and a special person. But, yes, I think it is the season for that.

Q. What spiritual practices keep you grounded?

Navarro: The obvious and spiritual thing to say would be, prayer, fasting, and reading the word. All of those are correct and in place in my life. However, the greatest practice that my pastor taught me is accountability. You have to be accountable to God first and foremost but also to a proven man or women of God who will not allow compromise into or around your life. You have to belong to a tightly guarded circle of people who not only support your calling but are ready to protect it at all cost. I have seen that in my pastor's life and in his ministry and I do my very best to mirror that in my life and ministry.