

Global Troubadours

Hillsong United have set the standard for contemporary worship.

It's a typical Friday night at Hillsong United. The parking lot is filled with skateboards, loud music, longhaired boys wearing ill-fitting jeans and girls huddled together in groups. Inside, thousands of teens pack the auditorium, hungry for a touch from God.

"Youth was, and still is, all about being ourselves and connecting with Jesus," says JD, one of the frontmen for the youth ministry's band, also called Hillsong United.

It is in this environment that a new generation of songwriters and worship leaders has emerged at Hillsong Church. Now one of the world's most popular worship bands, Hillsong United began their journey in 1998 at a summer camp. The youth encountered God, and the worship just did not stop.

Band leaders, including Reuben Morgan, Marty Sampson and Joel Houston—son of Hillsong founders Brian and Bobbie Houston—were also deeply impacted. "It was during this time they had a revelation about worship for the youth ministry," says tour manager Luke Webb.

Inspired by bands such as Delirious, Hillsong United were encouraged to write their own music. "The passion for songwriting was not based on producing albums or touring the globe, but for our youth to connect with God," Webb says. "[The band would ask], 'What would our friends want to sing and worship God to?' So they would write those songs."

A year later, at the church's annual Jam United Conference, the band recorded their first album, *Everyday*. Now after 10 albums, Hillsong United has become a global phenomenon, playing to packed stadiums worldwide and landing on Christian

and secular music charts. Their most recent album, *Across the Earth*, was No. 2 on the iTunes Top Albums chart after it released in May.

But for all their success, Hillsong United have always had a yearning to redress injustice they encountered while touring and to channel the passion of their global audience into social justice projects. In 2008 they launched phase one of their three-part project, The I Heart Revolution, with the release of the CD/DVD worship project *With Hearts As One*.

Last November, part two of the series, the documentary *We Are All in This Together*, screened in more than 500 theatres across the U.S. and Canada. Filmed over two years, the movie chronicles the band's journey through 42 nations, where they encountered Christians addressing such issues as human trafficking and extreme poverty.

The final part of the trilogy, , is an interactive Web site designed to inspire and mobilize users to be part of the solution to global problems. "If our worship is about great youth meetings, nice songs, lots of jumping around and a few CDs, then we are missing it," says Joel Houston, creative director of Hillsong Church and lead singer of Hillsong United.

"Our vertical expression must have a horizontal effect. So we'll continue to worship, praise and honor God with heart, soul, mind and strength the best we know how, but the fruit of that must be a generation who are totally committed to reaching the lost and helping those who need help, locally and globally."