But I'm An Artist!

Reflections Of A Worship Leader



AN INTERVIEW WITH MARTIN REARDON

What place do you believe creativity should have, both within the Church, and as an expression from the Church?

God is creative and we are to be like Him - therefore we should be creative. Never should we be creative for the "sake of creativity," but rather because He has gifted all of us in very unique ways. We should have creative outreaches, creative teachings, creative music, etc. in the Church.

However, I would caution against doing things just because we can. I have seen churches place pictures and artwork behind the lyrics on the overhead, and I personally find this distracting. Our creativity must always point the way and never get in the way.

For example, I love guitar effects, as should every good Vineyard child, but too often I have seen the congregation open their eyes to see what that noise was (often times that "noise" was coming from my amp!). It's not that the "creative juices" sounded bad, but rather that they were distracting - just as the artwork I have seen behind overheads is not bad art, but can be distracting. I believe creativity must be a part of every aspect of Church life, which is why we must always keep our motives in check.

"...Our creativity must always point the way"

How do you as a worship songwriter integrate poetry and creative lyricism / music with the need for accessibility in corporate worship songs?

I love my Electro Harmonix Memory Man Deluxe pedal, because one can do the most amazing things with the feedback option and speed of vibrato! WOW! I am excited just writing about it!

Having said that, while I find expression in tools like that, unfortunately not everyone does. The same goes for word play and poetry in worship music. Worship music should be both comfortable and uncomfortable; both familiar and strange. It's a fine line to walk as worship leaders and as creative people, and not a service goes by where I am not asking the Lord to keep me sensitive to this necessary tension.

This is especially true for multi-cultural and multi-racial congregations. My recommendation is to treat the issue a bit like a radio station might. You have all these listeners who wish to "tune in," and so you have to cater to each style just a bit. Play an old hymn, but maybe play it in a new arrangement. Play a new song with very few words, and instruct the congregation to sing their own melodies and words. Do not simply isolate a group (specifically in contemporary churches) by just playing all hymns for an entire set, and don't have solely "free-form" worship for an entire set. We never want to isolate people in their honest desire to worship God.

How do the music and sonic textures we place behind a song affect its reception by those listening and participating with the song?

I am a firm believer that notes speak as loudly as words. I love classical music in which there are no words. I happen to love opera, and even though I don't speak German, Latin or Italian, I am still moved by the melodies when they are sung.

I heard that Paul McCartney once said he wrote bass melodies that would stand alone, even if there were no other instruments being played. Every time I sit down to write I ask myself, "Will these notes say what the words say? Will there be continuity between the emotion the notes spark, and the thoughts the words inspire?"

I am not really talking about energy and intensity, musically. I am talking about examples such as Pachabel's Canon in D, where wordless music moves the soul. As worship leaders we must learn to strum "Holy, Holy, Holy" as passionately as we can sing it!

As a worship leader, through what other avenues do you express your creativity? Why?

I lead a band called Pageant and we play out at local clubs and bars. Why? Because God has called us to do it. I love the challenge of writing music that is worship, but says nothing about the subject of worship. As a creative person, it helps me to have more than one outlet for my creativity, so I don't try to force it all into one genre, like worship leading.



Martin Reardon is a featured worship leader on the CD *1000 Generations*, from Vineyard Music USA. He works with a band called Pageant, focusing on communicating truth through the vehicle of God-inspired creativity in non-church settings.