

QUESTIONS:

You grew up in South Africa, began your worship career in the UK, and moved to California three years ago. What does it mean when you say Because of Your Love is an 'American' album? The country/bluegrass influence? The instruments? Is this album somehow different than you might put together for Vineyard worship UK?

I guess it's no secret that traditional American folk music has had a big influence on popular music - the spirituals, the blues, rock and roll, old timey, bluegrass, country... All of these are around in some form or another in a lot of pop music - including the records we made with Vineyard music in the UK. I guess this time though I was just a little bit more intentional about it. I played a lot of older instruments - a dulcimer, a banjo, a 50's gibson acoustic guitar. My good friend Larry Myers played mandolin and fiddle on the record. And Aaron, who drummed on this record, rehearsed with an old marching drum for a kick drum. Even Dwayne's electric on most of this record is a Gretsch duo jet, one of Gretsch's earliest rock and roll guitars. Daniel played an old Rickenbacker bass from the 50's. And Joe mixed down on an old analog tape to tape. With this record we did our very best to take the music back to 'first principles' - which for us is older American folk music and four guys rocking out in a garage. The arrangements are stripped down and for me, quite a few of the songs even have a slightly 'old timey' feel to them - simple songs that large groups of people can sing. And I suppose this get's us to the reason behind the approach. I wanted the record to have a simple, uncluttered feeling to it. When I first started playing worship music there was nothing - seriously nothing - cool or glamorous about it. The draw really was only God's presence. It certainly wasn't the guy playing the 15 dollar guitar in tracksuit pants staring at the song book! I guess I wanted to present these songs in their most basic, but

hopefully still listenable, form. So I limited the kinds of things we would do on this record - as much live recording as possible, as simple an instrumentation as possible, few players etc.. Rock and roll and older American folk music lends itself to this approach. It's primarily 'voice music' with a little assistance! Because of this approach I think the record requires a little more from the listener, but hopefully, the listener is rewarded for the effort. I think some worship music only works as an act of participation. And maybe this record is little like that. That was a very long answer to the question! But it does get to the heart of the project i think. I wanted this to be a simple recording, documenting the kind of music we make when we worship together. The music we've been making since we've been in the States....

You've written or co-written many worship classics, including "Hallelujah (Your Love is Amazing)," "Holy," "Lord, Reign in Me," and the award-winning "Everlasting God." What elements make a successful worship song? Do you ever want to throw off those constraints and just write a song about, say, loving your wife or hating the California traffic?

To answer the second question first: I do and I have! In fact I'm in a band called 'dreamseed' that is not a congregational worship band. We recently did a record called 'closer to human ' (available on itunes) that contains a lot of these kinds of songs. A friend of mine from Africa, called Sunu Gonera, directed a movie for Lionsgate recently called 'Pride' and he very kindly asked me to get some music together for it. We used the movie as an opportunity to record this album and we're pretty happy with the result. I think as a musician it's unfair to expect that congregational worship music is going to meet every musical need you have. I think many of our churches are filled with musicians hoping to live out all of their musical dreams in the

Sunday morning worship service. This can make life hard for them, and it can also make life hard for their congregations!! Primarily, I believe our role as church musicians is to help our communities worship God together. The fact is that most art will never appeal aesthetically to *everyone* in our communities - hopefully because our church families are more diverse than that. At a certain point we need to go beyond our spiritual community into the broader community - creatively and personally. This is good for so many reasons - it's good for us musically and it's good for us in terms of our role as 'salt and light' in the world.

To answer the first question, I'm not sure I even know what a 'classic worship song' is. I mean I think the good ones are obviously easy to sing, musically interesting and within the bounds of orthodoxy. But what that actually sounds like this week or month or year is mystery that will keep me guessing for the rest of my life!

When you're out on the road, how do you mentally prepare for leading worship? Are you comfortable with your growing fame, and does it interfere or enhance your responsibilities as a worship leader? Can you even play "Come Let Us Return (Gloria)" if you're in a lousy mood?

I used to spend a lot of time and energy preparing for leading worship. I would take time off the night before and 'zone in'. But as the years have gone by I've found that that kind of behavior and intensity can be a little bit distracting. It's almost as if the act of leading worship becomes the focus rather than simply the Lord and his people. Leading worship for me is not a complicated task. It really is simply a band of musicians helping a group of people sing their prayers to our God. I remember John Wimber was asked the same question about preaching and his answer was apparently, I grab a coke and a bag of chips and get

out there. Every song we sing is a prayer to the Lord. So from the very first song we're praying. Sometimes it just feels strange to me to pray about praying about praying about praying etc... I'd rather just drink my diet coke and start! If worship is a time of prayer then I can begin praying no matter what state of mind I start in. Hopefully as our eyes and hearts turn to the Lord He begins to transform us.

Fame and celebrity are so much a part of our culture that it's hard sometimes to imagine what church without them would even look like. Even in churches that hold to older ecclesiastic traditions 'visiting speakers' have some kind of aura of celebrity. But not all of it is bad. At it's best this kind of thing can have the wholesome excitement a family might feel when a cherished family member returns home, or visits from far away. At it's worst it can be a terrible distraction where the focus becomes a person rather than the Lord. The discipline and art is to move the energy and focus towards Him.

Do you find inspiration from hymns, from the Bible, from the Holy Spirit, or from other composers like Paul Baloche or Willie Nelson? Can you name a few favorite songs that have influenced your art?

Strangely I seem to find inspiration from almost anything - movies, books, theatre, sport, nature, sermons, science, music, worship, scripture, prayer.... I have a musicians love for novelty, so songs that influence and inspire me today will definitely be different to those that will inspire me a year from now. But today I'm inspired by the Hillsong United records, the Passion records, the Kooks, Feist, Sufjan Stevens, Kim Walker's version of How he loves us. . . .

Your compositions are very guitar-friendly, as opposed to

keyboard. Are the lead sheets available for this album? Would you rather play in the key of G, D, open E, or some other key? What's your favorite oddball guitar chord? If you were stranded on a desert island, which guitar would you want with you?

Just like the last record the lead sheets will be up on www.brentonbrownmusic.com. I love any chord shapes that allow some open strings to 'pedal' or sustain during chord changes. All those keys, but especially G have that quality on the guitar. My desert island guitar would probably be my trusty Taylor who has served me for the last 10 years.

Is it true you were a Rhodes scholar? How do you measure success? Besides your role as husband, father and Christian, would you most like to be known as a successful songwriter, worship leader, record producer, or something else entirely?

Yes, I was a Rhodes Scholar. I guess I measure success like everyone else - am I getting it right? Of course the supposition for a follower of Jesus is that we are getting 'the right things' right. The thing I'm working hard on getting right is balancing the requirements of all those various roles you mentioned. I remember being told a story when I was young that influenced me a lot. A dad took his son to Madame Tussards. He pointed to all the wax work models in the exhibit and asked his son what all of the people they represented had in common. The answer was that they were all very good at one thing. I naturally aspire to be very good at one thing. But often this can mean that I'm not very good at all at anything else. Often to succeed in this world you have to pursue that 'one thing' to the exclusion of almost everything else. And then if you succeed in your chosen path you are hailed as being successful - regardless of how poorly you are doing in the other areas of your life, especially your so-called

'personal life'. But when we follow Jesus he requires more from us than simply succeeding at one thing. We have to do right in all our different roles. And because of this being good or even average in all of my various roles is more important than being excellent in only one of them and rubbish in the others. Pursuing this approach to success requires courage because the only people who are really seeing the full picture and are able to assess your 'success' are the Lord and your family. You may not get the ego strokes you desire from your work colleagues or high school reunion buddies, but that's okay. One day hopefully you will hear the 'well done my good and faithful servant'. That's success by any standard.