

New! Updated 07-04-03

MY MUSICAL JOURNEY

(how God has revealed Himself to me through His gift of music)

Frank Rasenberger

NB. The following testimony focuses on God's gift of music and how He has used it to touch my life and reveal Himself to me. God has also revealed Himself to me in other ways and through other people that are not mentioned in this testimony

My interest in, and love for, music began at an early age. My father is to this day a lover of classical, jazz and folk music. And so he introduced me to these particular styles of music. I was also introduced to more contemporary forms of music through television programs and my elder brothers Bernie and Rolf. Almost every Saturday evening my brothers and I would religiously watch 'Countdown' on the ABC. My brother Rolf got a job at the local 'Cut Price' supermarket in Acacia Ridge, Brisbane and it wasn't all that long before he acquired a reasonable stereo system. He used to spend some of his earnings on vinyl so he accrued a fair collection of rock music during his late primary and secondary school years. Some of the bands we were into at that stage were:- Kiss (before they really took off in Australia with the 'Dynasty' album), The Angels, AC/DC (the Bon Scott years), Deep Purple, Judas Priest, Whitesnake, the Sex Pistols, Gary Numan, and the list goes on. I would often retreat into Rolf's bedroom after school and we'd listen to records together or I would just go there myself to be alone in my private musical world.

As good as the music of most of these bands was and is, some of it was beginning to have a negative influence on the way I thought and felt about my life and life in general. When I was feeling 'down', some of the music contributed to me feeling even more 'down' and negative about life. When I was feeling rebellious, the music contributed to me feeling even more rebellious. Some of it (especially Kiss and Whitesnake) contributed to me seeing females as sex objects to be 'used' rather than human beings to relate to.

Getting my own stereo cassette unit was a big thing for me. My father and I went to Errol Stewarts and he bought it for me as a gift. I'd listen to the radio late into the night at times to FM radio stations. I remember tuning into Brisbane's Triple M for the 'Classic Album Hour' each week – sometimes recording the entire album of an artist they featured.

My musical tastes at that stage of my life were fairly one-sided. Music for me had to be hard and heavy – none of this disco and pop stuff!

It would be remiss of me at this point to fail mentioning Warren Bugg. Throughout my secondary school years he was my music teacher. He was the only music teacher at Sunnybank State High School at the time and, unfortunately for him, the subject of music was compulsory for all Grade 8 students whether they had the slightest interest in it or not. I, and the four or five others who continued in the subject, enjoyed what he imparted to us through it. Mr. Bugg (as we called him back then) was a teacher who related well to us. God used him to give me an appreciation for a wide variety of musical styles (from classical through to rock opera). He actually related to us on our level.

I think the first Christian rock music I ever heard was when I started attending my church's youth group after getting confirmed. The youth leader Steve Wockner (now a pastor of the Lutheran Church of Australia) used to pick me up in his car from my parents' home and he'd play Christian rock music on the way to the youth meeting. He would play music by Larry Norman, Randy Stonehill and Jerusalem – a Swedish rock band. I made some good friends through the youth group – some of these (Terry and Warren Wan) introduced me to some more Christian artists and bands. One of the other youth leaders – Sheryl – was heavily into Larry Norman as well. Our Friday evening youth meeting would usually include a time of singing. We would sing songs from the 'green book' ('All Together Now' compiled by singer/songwriter Robin Mann and others). During my ministry, I've come to appreciate the wide variety of songs in the 'All Together' series and the encouragement this resource gives towards community singing and worship.

I remember buying my first record at the Open Book shop in Milton, Brisbane. It was Keith Green's 'Prodigal Son' album. It wasn't exactly what I was into at the time but I grew to appreciate the artist's ministry and music later on.

My second exposure to Christian rock music was with an interdenominational parachurch mission organization called Youth With A Mission. I did a DTS (**D**iscipleship **T**raining **S**chool) with them which was kind of like an extended confirmation course. It comprised 3 months of lectures and 3 months of outreach – putting what you'd heard and learnt in the lecture phase into practice. During the lecture phase most of the guys all used to sleep in one big dorm. One of the staff workers called Paul Benfield would put on Dion's 'I Put Away My Idols' album on his record player. It wasn't what you would call 'heavy' music but I kind of liked it. I liked Dion's voice and especially enjoyed the rocky feel of the title track. The DTS students took turns washing dishes after communal mealtimes and we'd always wash them to some Christian music – Keith Green, Amy Grant, Michael W. Smith, David Meece, Don Francisco, etc. The music of most of these artists was too 'light' for my liking although I didn't mind the rockier songs of David Meece's '7' album.

There were 2 Canadians who were on the same DTS as I was. They introduced me to some other Christian rock artists and bands that I'd never heard before – artists and bands that were not as 'middle of the road' and 'mainstream' in sound. They would lend me their cassettes for me to listen to on a walkman. They introduced me to Steve Taylor's 'Meltdown' and 'On The Fritz' albums, Steve Camp's 'Fire & Ice', and Petra's 'Not Of This World' album. I was impressed with Steve Taylor's unique alternative/'new wave' style and I enjoyed the Petra album but it wasn't heavy enough for my liking. I was looking for something heavier. Then some one from the previous DTS (whose team had just returned from their outreach phase) lent me Rez's (also known as 'Resurrection Band') live 'Bootleg' album. I'd never heard Christian rock music this heavy before.

After my DTS, I went on to join the Melbourne YWAM staff. I shared a room with Dave Lawton - one of the staff who had been there pretty much from the very beginning. We became good friends. Before retiring for the night, Dave would play Bob Dylan's 'Infidels' album and 2nd Chapter of Acts' 'Singer Sower' album a lot.

Later, I became part of the Tribute team. ‘Tribute’ was a powerful, choreographed mime of the Gospel message set to a music soundtrack which went for about 40 minutes. We performed this at schools, churches, prisons, and on the streets. When on tour we were often billeted out. Once when we were ministering in and around Waikerie (South Australia), the people I was staying with lent me a cassette containing the Resurrection Band albums ‘DMZ’ and ‘Colors’. These albums blew me away (even more than the above-mentioned ‘Bootleg’ album). I didn’t think Christians could perform music as heavy and as well-produced as this. Resurrection Band’s music was on a par with the mainstream heavy rock bands I grew up listening to. On top of this, they had their own unique musical style.

Once when I went home to Brisbane for a holiday I did something I still regret to this day. I burnt most of my secular label records in a fire I’d lit in the backyard of my parents’ home. (I also gave some of my records away to my brother’s best friend Steve.) Perhaps this was the right thing for me to do at that time in my life – perhaps I needed to make a clean break with some of the music that reminded me too much of my past. I still regret it though, because my action came from a false and simplistic mindset that upheld the view that all Christian label music is good and inspired by God, and all secular label music is evil and ‘of the devil’. It seemed to make no allowances for those Christian artists who recorded on secular labels to bring the Gospel message, their faith and Christian values to a wider audience. It seemed to deny the fact that all musical creativity originates with God (even if it has been distorted by Satan or used selfishly by some artists and bands).

After my holidays, I returned to the YWAM base in Melbourne. I was a member of a bush band that Dave Lawton ran called ‘Bush Telegraph’. We performed in and around Melbourne at various celebrations and functions. Coming back from a bush dance or some function one afternoon, the driver put on Stryper’s ‘To Hell With The Devil’ album. Again, I was blown away by the heaviness of it. Michael Sweet’s piercing vocals impressed me as well. Gina – a fellow staff worker – loaned me another Stryper album called ‘Soldiers Under Command’. (She also at one time loaned me a Kerry Livgren album. [Kerry Livgren was formerly of the progressive rock band Kansas.])

After about a 3-year stint in YWAM, I began a Bachelor of Theology degree at Luther Seminary in Adelaide. James Krieg (one of my classmates) and I shared an interest in ‘Jesus music’ (the pioneers of Contemporary Christian Music – Larry Norman, Randy Stonehill, Randy Matthews, etc.) and exchanged cassettes. (James is now a pastor/university chaplain in Adelaide). I also became good friends with one of the boarders there called Steve Abraham (now a pastor of the Lutheran Church of Australia). He was a big fan of metal music performed by Christians (called ‘White Metal’ at the time). He began lending me cd’s and told me about a music magazine called ‘Heaven’s Metal’ which was all about the growing Christian metal scene. He also told me about CMP (Christian Music Products) – a Christian music mail order business based in Melbourne – which supplied a lot of the more alternative and metal Christian music. I also purchased some music at the Open Book (Brendan Boughen who worked there at the time was a big help) and Word Bookstore – 25 Grenfell Street in the city (Adelaide).

While at Seminary in Adelaide, I would regularly listen to ‘Sunday’s Rock’ on 5PBA Fm Sunday evenings (presented by Graham Branford) and ‘Gospel Music Breakfast’ on Triple M

(now called 3-D Radio, presented by Arthur Marsh). Arthur Marsh's program was very eclectic and tended to feature more of the alternative and underground artists and bands of Contemporary Christian Music. Graham Branford featured more of the mainstream Christian rock and metal artists. During our time in Adelaide, Alta Mira FM (now known as Life FM) was granted a 24-hour, 7-days-a-week license. I was not all that supportive of them at first as I thought a Christian radio station would cater mainly to the church. However, their approach of playing a mix of mainstream/secular and Christian artists and bands won me over and demonstrated to me their mission focus.

During my seminary days, I spent a number of weekends living and working at the Lutheran Emergency Family Shelter. This gave the director Bill Waring and other staff some free time to spend with their families. L.E.F.S provides emergency short-term accommodation for homeless families. The majority were mothers with children escaping domestic violence situations. The other full-time staff workers were Karl Brettig and Graham Ross. It was Karl in particular who introduced me to another form of contemporary worship music – Vineyard music. He and Graham Ross utilised some of this music in the second more-informal service at Glynde Lutheran Church. This was a worship service to which residents at the shelter were invited.

After seminary, my wife Anne and I went to Cambrai, South Australia – my first parish. A few years after being there, Anne noticed an article in the Barossa Herald newspaper on the Barossa Valley's first community radio station – Triple Bfm (**B**arossa **B**roadcasting **B**oard) (www.triplebradio.cjb.net). The article spoke about the need for more presenters and volunteers to work at the station and it mentioned an upcoming radio presenters and volunteers course. Anne encouraged me to apply so I rang up about it and enrolled in the course. It went for about 8 weeks – two evenings a week (Tuesday's and Thursday's). I thoroughly enjoyed the course. It gave me a deeper appreciation for radio as a powerful means of communication. It also seemed to complement my ministry as far as teaching effective speaking skills. At the end of the course we were asked to record a demo tape of a half-hour program to be assessed by the board. With much fear and trepidation I went into the studio, recorded and submitted it to the board. A few weeks later I was given the thumbs up to be a presenter.

I was asked by the board to present a program Sunday evenings from 8 to 10 pm. It followed a program of classical music ('Classic Classic') presented by Margaret Luke (wife of Barossa blues artist Tony Luke). My time slot was in turn followed by a program that featured the best music of the 50's and 60's eras ('Sounds Unlimited') presented by Peter Sellen. I generally started my program with an instrumental, quasi-classical track. The first hour of the program featured mainly lighter adult contemporary, celtic, blues and pop music. The second hour featured alternative/indie, rock, and some hard rock and metal music.

My first show went to air on Sunday evening the 7th of December, 1997. Janet Roenfeldt (a member of the board and one of the presenters) suggested I call the program 'Message In Music'. It was my conviction from the very beginning that the program needed to have a mix of mainstream/secular and contemporary Christian artists and bands. To play only quality Christian label artists and bands was in my view to play only to the converted. Realistically speaking, how many listeners who happened to tune into the show would stay tuned to it if they recognized

none of the songs? Why not also play a range of quality mainstream music that addresses life issues in a positive way?

There was a fair bit of pressure the first year of 'Message In Music'. Preparing a quality 2-hour program takes a fair effort if one wants to keep it fresh and varied. 'Message In Music' was mainly music. It was my conviction to let the artists and the music do the talking. Let **them** bring the message. Good quality music with a powerful message speaks for itself. It needs no long and 'wordy' introductions – it only needs to be identified and introduced briefly. Quite often I'd introduce or comment on an artist or band and, if the song had a strong message, I'd mention this before playing it. Preparing a program for every Sunday evening of the year was not only challenging but quite demanding at times. The second year of the show I began advertising for another volunteer to become a kind of co-presenter of the show. That way, we could alternate shows and present about once a fortnight. Janet Roenfeldt told me of someone who was doing the volunteer course. His name was Brian Wiebrecht. He eventually came on board and became co-presenter of 'Message In Music'. His musical tastes were in many ways different but he had the same conviction I have in presenting a mix of mainstream and Christian label artists and bands. With Brian's involvement, instead of it becoming a burden, I enjoyed my radio presenting even more.

My 86th and final show took place on Sunday evening the 4th of June, 2000. My final song for the show was Ozzy Osborne's ballad 'Goodbye To Romance' – a fitting song for the show had indeed become one of the loves of my life. It was sad to be leaving a community radio station that had supported and encouraged the concept behind the show from the very beginning. I had come to know many of those who were involved in some way in the running of the station. I left with the satisfaction of knowing that 'Message In Music' would continue thanks to Brian Wiebrecht.

I came to my second parish with the intention of continuing my volunteer radio work. (Prior to arriving in Crow's Nest, I'd heard that there was a community radio station in Toowoomba called 4DDB-FM. I'd also heard that there was a Christian radio station called 'The Light', as well as a local tourist radio station in Crow's Nest itself.) I struggled as to which station to become involved with. I balked at The Light's approach of playing primarily Christian label artists. Further to this, any songs by Christian artists or bands that were not currently on their playlist would need to be approved by them before playing them on air. Coming from my community radio approach to music, their approach was far too rigid and controlling.

As well as continuing my volunteer radio work, I also wanted to continue to develop some of the resources I'd begun developing in Cambrai. Some of the special editions of 'Message In Music' formed the basis for some of these resources. Throughout the first year of our stay in Crow's Nest I was hoping and aiming to do both - continue my volunteer radio presenting as well as continue developing contemporary music resources. However, the more I wrestled with the idea, the more it seemed that God was saying to me that there was no way I could do both justice, and that I would need to choose to work on one and put aside the other for the time being. It seemed to me that God was telling me to 'simplify' and to not spread myself too thin. It was a difficult decision but I chose to put aside my love for radio presenting and continue putting my spare time into developing quality contemporary music resources which would be available on the internet

www.angelfire.com/ar/manse/Contemporary_Music_Resources_from_Frank_Rasenberger.htm).

The main purpose of these resources is to make contemporary music in its many and varied forms more accessible to radio announcers, university chaplains, youth workers, youth and any one who loves God's gift of music. Slowly but surely God has made me aware of leaders in the world of contemporary music who have been willing to incorporate some of my resources on their websites or at least provide links to them. The development of these resources is my feeble and imperfect response to God and the way he has blessed me and spoken to me through contemporary mainstream and Christian music. Most of these resources are ones that can be added to or further developed and will hopefully continue after I've shed this mortal coil.

In looking back and reflecting on the way God has led me in my musical journey, He has definitely used contemporary music in its many and varied forms as a channel of His revelation. He has used it to speak to me, bring His Word to me, and reveal Himself to me. He has also broadened my musical tastes over the years and given me a love and appreciation for music of various genres.

To Him be the glory,
Frank Rasenberger