

NEWSBOYS

Hallelujah FOR THE Cross

Since arriving on the scene in 1985 in their native Australia, the Newsboys have taken Christian music by storm. Nearly three decades later, the iconic band is an undisputed industry leader, garnering six gold albums; 8 million units in career sales; 33 #1 singles; multiple GRAMMY® and American Music Award nominations; and signature hits ranging from "He Reigns" and "Born Again" to their recent 15-week chart-topper, "We Believe." Expanding their reach into film, the band appeared in the 2014 Pure Flix hit, "God's Not Dead," inspired by their song of the same name. Currently comprised of drummer Duncan Phillips; lead vocalist Michael Tait; guitarist Jody Davis; and keyboardist Jeff Frankenstein, the Newsboys' latest recording, Hallelujah For The Cross, marks their first-ever collection of hymns.

It's no secret that the Newsboys spend a lot of their days on the road. They're constantly challenged and driven to make powerful, intriguing music that will continue to bring their message of faith to anyone who will listen. They've been doing it for almost three decades now. That's a long time to consistently make new and exciting music but they've continued to do it with fervor and drive, allowing them to stay at the top of their game in the process.

Keeping things fresh can be a challenge in all aspects of life. Old things can seem stagnant and past their "due date" and we get caught up in the glitz of what's fresh and uncharted. And then there are those things in life that just become more poignant, more meaningful and quite simply, more needed as time goes on. Their depth and power never seem to lose their luster.

So, when the Newsboys decided to unveil their first ever hymns collection HALLELUJAH FOR THE CROSS, this was their first challenge. How do we take these powerful, foundational hymns, that for hundreds of years have managed to stay valid and not become redundant even though they were written so long ago, and refresh them for today's listener? The hymns don't necessarily need to be rescued but a new audience needs to hear them.

Old hymns don't get much press these days but they haven't lost their punch. Newsboys manager Wes Campbell knows this well. "There's a lot of truth and power in those old hymns," he says. "We're not saying

we've redone them completely but we have gone and taken that nugget from these hymns and made them accessible to a new generation. Our hope is that people will then go back and explore the full lyrics and learn the story behind them. They're pretty powerful."

Overall, there was a purposeful effort to keep the integrity of the original hymn but to modernize it and make it palatable for today's audiences, so taking some creative license had to be employed. "We took a bit of a modern worship approach to these old hymns," Wes said. "We kept the verses in there and it really does open a pathway to where these songs came from and sheds some light on the songs for people who've never really sung hymns."

Lead singer Michael Tait agrees. "Hymns are important to me. Wes Campbell, producer Seth Mosley, and myself sat and picked through songs that went way, way, way back into my past and my dad's Baptist church. I love modern worship but I just love that old stuff because they were written in such desperate and perilous times, and out of great pain comes great resolve, I think. When I sing them, they go deeper in ways to me than a lot of things I reach out for when I'm in that spiritual drought," he adds.

Michael has some favorites on the album. "It Is Well," I love," he continues. "I just love that story. The way I chose to sing it and arrange it with Wes and Seth was done not so much in a haphazardly, happy way but more like a victory call, with resolution. Really saying, 'It is Well!' with a power behind it. No two ways about it that this was one of my favorites."

The group deviated a bit with the album's title cut and debut single, penned by Ross King and Todd Wright but overall, held closely to the goal of reaching deep into that ancient well of songs that used to be the foundation of the Christian faith.

Produced by Seth Mosley—who helmed Newsboys' RIAA Certified Gold Selling record *God's Not Dead* — additional highlights of *Hallelujah for the Cross* include "Jesus Paid It All"; "Holy, Holy, Holy"; and "All Creatures of Our God and King." The album also features a new arrangement of Newsboys' classic "Where You Belong/Turn Your Eyes."

Each song on the list had to be fleshed out to see if putting a Newsboys interpretation to it would work. "Some of the older hymns didn't lend themselves to modernization," Wes recalls. "If you adjusted the rhythm or structure of the song, it would fall apart so that helped us narrow the list a bit."

After all these years, the band finally found a time period when they could gather and do this album that they've wanted to do for a while but the timing just hadn't presented itself yet. "Obviously you want it to be successful but this project wasn't done for the big sales thing," Wes stresses. "This was something we just really wanted to do. We really want people to be introduced to the power of the lyric. That seemed lost for a time but I think some of the modern worship music today, of late, are songs that I'm starting to notice more depth and power coming back in them. For a minute there it got to where everything seemed distilled down so this seems like the perfect time to release these older hymns and have people really get them."

"This album is a nice detour to a place, by today's terms, less traveled," Michael adds. "I won't say uncharted because I've been there in the past but this is not my usual fare. For me, as a seasoned musician, I like the fact that we could bring something, still intact, that might usually be left to an older generation, to the forefront of where we are today with CCM and music period, and make it new again."

Wes adds, "The guys all grew up, especially Michael, singing hymns in the church. There's a lot of truth and power in those old hymns. Our song, "We Believe," had deeper meaning and I think gave us the confidence after going #1 for 15 weeks with such deep lyrics, that maybe this is the time. Let's point back to the past. Let's point back to where we came from. The lyrics in hymns are a message. The circumstances that the people were in when they wrote the songs were incredible. 'I'm blind but now I see?' That was literal. For our fans, I think it will be timeless. These songs aren't going to go out of style anytime soon."

