

SERVING THE WHOLE BODY OF BELIEVERS

Irish composer Keith Getty has a passionate vision for writing and sharing congregational music which bridges divisions and serves the 21st-century church. Presently based in America, he and his wife Kristyn will be touring the UK in June 2009. CMQ spoke to Keith to find out more.

Q • When did you start to get involved in church music, and what led you to begin writing hymns and songs for the church?

A • I got involved in music when I was ten – first as a classical guitarist, then as a flautist. Along the way I also did some piano study and choral and orchestral conducting. I was involved in church music from the very start. My father loved choral singing, sang in some excellent choirs, and was a church organist. In the Presbyterian church I grew up in we used both the hymnal and new contemporary worship music.

Just before I went to university, I got my break into professional music. I was a flute student with James Galway in Switzerland for a summer school, and he asked me to write some arrangements. He didn't think I was a very good flute player(!) but he encouraged me in my arranging and helped redirect my career.

Love of God revealed in wonder
By the works of a Maker's hand,
Seas that roar with thund'rous splendour,
Fields that whisper at His command;
All the joys of life we cherish
Are God's gracious sign;
We are children of His promise,
Heirs of mercy and grace divine.

*Unfailing love from Heaven's throne,
That sought me out and brought
me home;
My song of praise shall ever be:
'The Father's love for me'.*

Love of God revealed in frailty
Through the gift of a servant King,
Sov'reign pow'r robed in humility,
Perfect grace crowned with suffering –
Oh, what love, that calls humanity
To kneel at the cross
And exchange our sin's futility
For the joy of a Father's love.

Love of God, what priceless treasure
Over all this world affords,
To be His and His forever;
This my glory and my reward!
May this love, beyond all knowing,
So capture my soul
That I'm filled to overflowing
With a passion for Christ alone.

Love of God Revealed in Wonder
Keith Getty & Stuart Townend
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When I went to Durham University I really had to look at my faith again. I struggled with the uniqueness of Christ, as well as whether scripture could be believed and why I should believe it. After about a year and a half I came to the conclusion that Christ's life, teaching, death and resurrection were unique, and that to accept Christ's claims with any

integrity, one could and should follow his word.

During my time at university I began to study choral directing with James Lancelot, the Organist at Durham Cathedral, which increased my love for church music, liturgy and choral evensong that had begun at grammar school with my music teacher, Peter Hunter. As someone who had thought very deeply and intentionally about faith and belief, and as a professional musician, I struggled to apply all this to the overall direction of contemporary worship music. This became a real problem for me, and I was not involved in local church music for several years. However, stemming from the challenge of my pastor to get involved in writing songs for the church, and then meeting Stuart Townend, I began a journey to try to write what have become known as modern 'folk hymns'. I had two goals. I wanted to write hymns that were lyrically poetic, theological and thought-provoking, as well as of musical use in a variety of settings – cathedrals with choirs, contemporary churches with rock bands or folk bands, or indeed churches with no musical instruments, as is the case for a growing number of churches around the world.

Q• Are there any composers or writers who have particularly influenced your work?

A• Thousands! First of all I love Irish folk music. The Irish melodic contour extends a little wider than many English hymns. For example, the melodies of the *Londonderry Air* and *Slane* cover an octave and a fourth. I love English church music, especially music by Vaughan Williams, Finzi and Howells, and also Broadway musicals from Gershwin onwards – there are lots of influences.



Q• What are the ingredients for writing a song or hymn, and is there a difference between the two?

A• There is no technical difference. Augustine said that a hymn is a song of praise to God.

From a ‘vertical dimension’, if we look back to the Psalms, we see songs that speak beautifully and poetically of God’s character in its diversity, in its mystery, and in its revealed nature, and yet speak honestly, passionately and personally. As Christians we also have the chance to speak about

God from a clear Christ-centred and Trinitarian standpoint.

The ‘horizontal dimension’ that makes Christian worship radically different from any other form of singing is what makes the Church different: that is, it is a body of believers of every age group, of every taste, of every social order, of every nation, tribe, creed and tongue, coming together to sing to their Creator and Redeemer. Modern charismatic worship that divides congregations because they can’t sing it, or traditional choral

music that divides congregations because they can’t relate to it are, I think, failing the body of believers. The music we sing must serve the body of believers, and we as musicians are servants to it.

Q• Many churches in the UK offer different services in different styles to cater for various musical tastes. What’s your view?

A• I don’t have a really strong opinion here. Every case is different. I think the body of believers should be together as much as possible, so my instinct would tend towards not splitting congregations. That said, I don’t think curry and ice cream go together well (most of the time!). The way to bring people together in a church is not to force the pipe organ to play Coldplay . . . where humanly possible we should create a congregation of people who want to love and care for each other.



The Gettys in performance



Keith and Kristyn Getty

Flowing naturally out of that they will want to enjoy each other, encourage each other, and support and respect each other's music. The music is not the main thing – when it becomes the main thing, that's when division happens.

Q • You and your wife Kristyn have travelled widely in the UK and US to share your music with others and will be giving concerts across the UK this month. Tell us why touring is important to you.

A • While it is wonderful to do magazine interviews and talk about music, what is important is actually to hear music. I think it is the duty of every composer in history to share his music as much as he can. Music and art are 'caught' in life better than 'taught'. During our UK tour last October, we had the privilege of performing to 10,000 people, and joining with massed choirs. At least 500 music directors in one week got to sample the music, taste it, feel it and sing it in its context. I think it's the best way to introduce music to people.

As a composer I also think I have a responsibility to be listening, so I always take time after concerts to spend time with people who were there – with music directors, pastors and lay people, listening to their dreams, their concerns and their ideas. That's part of my responsibility to the body of believers as a composer.

Q • Where would you like to see church music go in the future?

A • I would love to see what is sung being a beautiful and passionate description of the God of the Bible and of Christ who is the centre of our faith and the only hope for a lost world.

I would also love to see music serve the whole body of believers so we can be a singing church – as the church has been in every great age of revival, a vibrant Christian witness with music as strong, innovative and brave as it can be.

As we enter a multi-faith age and the challenges of the 21st century, I want to see Christians who are robust in their understanding of faith and music playing a part in that.

'IN CHRIST ALONE' UK TOUR 2009

Friday 12 – Sunday 14 June
National Concert Hall, Glasgow

Wednesday 17 June
Oxford Community Church, Oxford

Saturday 20 June
Waterfront Hall, Belfast

Wednesday 24 June
The King's Centre, Chessington

Thursday 25 – Friday 26 June
The Regent Theatre, Ipswich

Saturday 27 June
Brighton Dome, Brighton

Sunday 28 June
Caird Hall, Dundee

LINKS

www.gettymusic.com
www.myspace.com/keithandkristyngetty
www.youtube.com/keithandkristyngetty



Keith and Kristyn are preparing for the next stage of their UK tour, 'In Christ Alone'.

