

"Psalms of Hope at the New Hope Center"

By Jose "Pete" Marquez

It's a long road up, a short time at the top, and then, my brothers, you better know the way home." This has always been attributed to Joe Cocker. I know he was referring to rock stars, but I really can't recall when and where he said this. One thing I also know, this brings into focus the romantic image of a rock star's long and arduous journey up, only to flame out in a short burst of glory, and then the quick skid down hill to anonymity.

But there's a "poet-songwriter" whose star has been shining brightly through the ages—since he picked up his lyre as a boy to soothe the aching flesh and spirit of his king, up until he became a king himself, and up until today thousands of years later. His secret? Well, it is not really a secret at all, because it has been a refrain in a number of his songs—"My words have I hid in my heart."

On May 20, 2007, at 10:00 in the morning, a number of "poet-songwriters" who, like King David, "have hid God's words in their hearts," will be performing at the *New Hope Center* located at 1821 Meadowview Road, Sacramento, CA 95832. These performers will be bannered by Larissa Lam, Maximilian, and Only Won. This will be the second in a series of concerts lined up for them by the *New Hope Center*. This series of concert is free and open to the public. A number of people who have been to the first concert held last month said that it was not just a concert. They said that what struck them most was the fact that these really talented artists were not performing to seek glory for themselves but to celebrate and to give glory to God.

ONLY WON

We pinned down one of the *New Hope Center* concert series' featured performers—Only Won—for an interview. This young artist is remarkable not because of his long and impressive resume (which includes stints in Hollywood and Nashville), but because of his faith and dedication.

We initially planned to write an article based on this interview but after prying over his answers, we thought you'd know and appreciate this young and talented young man better if you hear his own words. So here goes the interview:

Q. Please feel free not to answer any of my questions if you're not comfortable

with it. You don't need to explain why. Please tell me your birth date and place.

A. May 17, 197x

Q. Where did you go to school—elementary to college?

A. Cordova High and Sac State

Q. I know you're an engineer. Please tell me your field of specialization.

A. Mechanical

Q. Your current employer and nature of work.

A. Barry-Wehmiller Design Group—Engineering Design, Services, Consultation

Q. Do you have brothers and sisters? How many? Are you the eldest...second to the eldest...etc.?

A. I have a younger brother

Q. Please describe your family?

A. My parents are from HK. Both worked hard to make sure my brother and I didn't have to struggle, but we struggled enough to teach us the value of hard work.

Q. Please describe the kind of childhood you had.

A. Middle class. I spent most of my time studying and practicing whether it was schoolwork, music classes, or sports. There weren't too many days when I had nothing to do. It kept me out of trouble.

Q. How did you come to know the Lord?

A. My parents raised me in the church. In college I went through some kind of discovery and studied all the major religions. None of them offered me the hope that Jesus Christ did so I came back to the Lord and recommitted my life to Him.

Q. How did you find out that you have musical talent or gift?

A. I just started singing in church and did musicals. As I got older, I'd try

imitating artists that I heard on the radio to try to sound like them. I developed my love for hip hop/R&B and tried writing my own songs. My youth counselor at church was a singer/songwriter and we thought he was the coolest guy at church. He bought me my first contemporary Christian record. Since then, I wanted to perform songs with a message and not just the stuff you hear on mainstream radio.

Q. What is your favorite (secular) song and why?

A. Parents Don't Understand—Will Smith...aka: The Fresh Prince. It was a really funny song and wasn't vulgar and had some truth to it. To this day, I think my parents still don't understand. Oh well...I still love them. J

Q. What is your favorite hymn and why?

A. The Old Rugged Cross—I just always remember singing it at church for some reason. It helped me visualize what Jesus did for us.

Q. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I understand that rap music is mostly associated with gang-bangers and their violent activities. Why did you choose it (rap music) in sharing the gospel?

A. Rap started out as a voice of the street...a way to express injustice. Like many things in our society, we pervert things and make something that started off as innocent, become bad. A lot of people that spend their times on the streets do face injustice, but they have used the rap medium and twisted it to become a way to glorify the wrong type of lifestyle. The energy of the music is still fun and attractive, but I want to take back what was fun and innocent and throw in some of the hope that is needed as we express injustice. Why only rap about what is wrong? Why not take it to the next level and offer a solution? That's the only way to better our world.

Q. Why do you think rap music will be a good medium in sharing the good news of salvation to other people?

A. It's still the #1 most listened to genre of music. It's in almost every musical score in the movies these days. When people party and go dancing, the type of music they listen to is hip hop based cuz the beats inspire people to move. The bible says to sing unto the Lord a new song...and to make a joyful noise such as clanging cymbals. You can't get much noisier than the bass you hear in someone's car. Rap is now a part of all types of music, too. There are hip hop beats in country, pop, R&B, gospel, and even jazz. If it's the most heard medium

of music, we need to put some good news into that medium.

Q. Looking at the historical backdrop when Jesus performed His ministry here on Earth, Jesus Himself could be considered as a sort of a "dissident" or a "rebel". Has this "idea" anything to do with your decision to use rap music?

A. I wouldn't say I'm doing this as a rebel. I'm doing this cuz I sincerely enjoy the music and understand why it is so popular now. Jesus was an innovator, not an imitator. As music evolves, I believe Christians have the responsibility to be at the forefront of it and be innovative in how we present God's love. In a society where music is no longer freely taught in schools, most musicians are learning how to sing and play music in the church. We should take this opportunity and provide something great for the world to hear.

Q. How about the idea that during the time of Jesus, the popular means of conveying ideas (like teaching or preaching) was by telling stories, vignettes, parables, and fables—do you find parallelism in this when you try to use rap music to communicate your message and ideas?

A. Songs are stories. The reason why movies are so popular is because stories are so captivating. A good artist will produce a CD that tells a story that people can relate to. That's why there is always a storyboard when musicians shoot a music video. It's not just music. People want to see what that music is about.

Q. How would you convince people in my age group (40s, 50s, and up) to buy into your idea of using rap music in winning souls for the Lord, when admittedly, a large majority in our age group has yet to be comfortable with rap music?

A. Have them read the lyrics to the songs first before they even hear the music. Let them read the mission of the artist and let them see how the artist lives his/her life. If they see me as a man first and foremost that loves God and wants to share that love with everyone, they then will see why I sing or rap the songs I do. I believe our love shows more than our music does. A lot of times musicians lose sight of what is important and that is the relationship that develops between the artist and the listener.



Q. When you compose or write your songs, is it necessary that you should be in a certain physical, emotional, or mental state or situation? If so can you share them to us?

A. Most of the time I do write when I'm inspired, that is when my senses are stimulated by inspiring things around me...by what I see, hear, witness. It's hard to come up with a good song if you're not inspired by something real. I wrote "Desperate Cry" cuz one day I was thinking back about my life and where I could have been and where some of my friends did end up. I was thankful of the choices I made and inspired to share with people that they too have the ability to make the right choices. It's not always easy, but at some point, if we make the wrong ones, we will need to cry out for a change.

Q. Is there a particular "thing" that inspires you to compose or write?

A. Life's mistakes, unfairness, and hopelessness...but knowing that God is the opposite of those things.

Q. I know a lot of artists follow or perform some "rituals" to prepare before a performance. Do you do the same and would you be willing to share it with us?

A. I try not to talk for several hours before I perform. I need to get my head in the right mindset so I also try to be alone.

Q. If you are asked to perform one song before the inmates at death row of San Quentin Prison, which song or hymn would you sing and why?

A. "When." It's a song about a father who's son purposely left the family to live a reckless lifestyle and how that father never gave up on his son and loves him so much that he dwells on the hope of one day reuniting with his son. I hope that would inspire inmates to know that God loves them the same way...no matter what they did in the past, it's in the past and Christ can make them new again. That is the hope we all need in this world.

Only Won has just released his first album—"Only Won." I've listened to some of its tracks a number of times and I am beginning to change my mind about his kind of music.

