

FEARLESS NOW SHERI CARR

Worship artists face a puzzling conundrum in this day and age. They are called to create an atmosphere of worship, an environment of adoration, a place where ordinary people can encounter the Living God. These artists are, by their very calling, endowed with unique creativity and spiritual sensitivity. And that is where the lines get a little blurry.

A traditional artist's bio should open with a snappy quote followed by a brief life history and a laundry list of significant accomplishments. There should be glowing accolades regarding their current standing among peers and prognostications of future greatness all designed to convince the reader that the artist in question is successful, talented, and, in the case of artist/worshippers, considerably more spiritual than the average person occupying a pew on any given Sunday. Bottom line - a bio is supposed to elevate the artist to the semi-mythic level of a rock star.

Sheri Carr is not a rock star. If you are looking for one, you'll have to look someplace else.

"The best place for me to be is on my face," Sheri declares, "and that is one of the hardest things to do. There is this whole 'worship leader star' thing happening, and it is so easy to get caught up in striving to get ahead. But it's not about having the best marketing team in place or getting great promo. All that can shift the focus off of the Lord. That is our challenge - to keep the focus where it belongs. It's all about staying on my knees."

While Sheri acknowledges the challenges of putting herself into the highly visible arena of a recording worship artist, she insists she is not daunted by it. "I think this is part of why God made me," she muses. "This is my journey. These songs are the ups and downs of my walk with the Lord. I'm trusting Him to do whatever He wants with them. I'm humbled and excited, but I admit it is a weird place to be."

Sheri draws on two distinct, yet inextricably intertwined sources for her worship songs - the Scriptures and her own life's journey. "A lot of my songs are straight scripture," she says. "And a lot of songs have been birthed out of trying times in my life; times when I've gone through physical or emotional challenges."

Sheri points to the title track of her debut CD, a song that took seven months to complete, as an example of translating her life experience into a song of worship.

"'Fearless Now' was birthed during a time in my life when I was actually really fearful," she confesses. "I dealt with a painful back condition last summer that left me homebound for several months. I was afraid I would be in chronic pain for the rest of my life. I had never faced anything like that before, but God moved in those times. He spoke to me through the Psalms, specifically Psalm 56. It's about walking by faith, not by sight. It is about trusting and praising even when you don't feel God; when you don't hear Him; when you don't see Him."

Sporting a sound that falls lithely between the gritty roots rock of Jennifer Knapp and the graceful, poetic lyricism of Nichole Nordeman, Sheri Carr deftly tightwalks a line that stretches between ancient themes of grace and mercy, and is anchored by contemporary declarations of truth and faith. There are exuberant expressions of praise ("Sing Your Praise," "Shout Aloud"), hymns of trust ("Fearless Now," "Into Your Arms"), and psalms of adoration ("You Are So Beautiful," "Just As The Angels"). Whether raucously celebratory or lost in pensive worship, there is a humble honesty that runs through each song, binds them all together, and points both listener and singer toward the throne of God.

Yes, Sheri Carr is a worship leader. Or a contemporary psalmist. Or a lead worshiper. Or whatever label you want to wrap around a singer/songwriter who crafts hooky, pop-rock oriented hymns that can just as easily inhabit a Sunday morning worship service as a Top 40 Christian radio playlist. But it was not always so.

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Before she became a worship leader she had her sights set on playing in a big city symphony. And she was well on her way. A top-notch flautist (and a self-proclaimed performance junkie), Sheri nearly auditioned for the Chicago Civic Orchestra while she was still in high school. She might have pursued it, too, if God had not showed up unexpectedly during her senior year.

“My dad was a pastor,” Sheri explains. “So I had gone to church all my life. I heard all the stories and I knew a lot *about* Jesus. But during my senior year in high school I finally had a personal encounter with the Lord. The only way I can describe what happened is that I used to be a performer. I lived for that performance high. It was all about the applause. That is what drove me. But when the Lord got hold of my heart, I lost my desire for that. It just felt so empty. Once I experienced God’s presence and worshipping Him, nothing else really compared. He changed my heart. I no longer wanted to be a performer, I wanted to be a worshipper.

Although the change was evident, change did not come easy. Without her lifelong dream to pursue, Sheri admits to feeling directionless.

“I was lost for a season because I had been so focused on being a performer,” she says. “I didn’t know what to do with myself after high school, so I took a season off, got some random job, and started volunteering at church. I made myself available for local ministry and over the next two years the Lord turned me into a worship leader.”

Being involved with ministry at such a young age convinced Sheri that while calling is imperative, training was also essential if she was going to be effective.

“I think because I went into ministry so soon after high school I felt really ill-equipped,” Sheri acknowledges. “I was hungry for a deep discipleship experience. I wanted to learn and grow in my own character and knowledge of the Bible.”

Her search for training that would combine book knowledge with hands on experience led her to Youth With A Mission where she spent three months of intensive discipleship training before embarking on a two-month adventure in the Far East.

“I spent a month with a team in New Delhi, India, encouraging some of the local Christian churches, ministering in orphanages and doing street ministry in some of the rougher areas of the city. We just loved on kids and handed out food, whatever we could to be Jesus to the people. Then I spent a month in Nepal, hiking into villages where they had literally never heard the name of Jesus before. That whole experience was a huge turning point for me. God gave me a heart for the world. I had been a songwriter for most of my life, but it was at that point that I really started turning my songs toward worship.”

Sheri credits producer Nathan Nockels with capturing her unique vision for every song on the album. “He has an incredible gift for pulling the best out of the artists he works with,” Sheri declares. “He was really good at getting inside my head and discovering what my vision was for each song. He invited me to be a part of the artistic direction of the project from start to finish. Every song was ten times better for having him be a part of it.”

With ***Fearless Now*** Sheri maps the mountain tops and valleys of the Christian journey. It’s not all roses, but it’s not all desert, either. The twelve songs that make up the project explore the height, breadth, and depth of what it means to worship fearlessly, regardless of the circumstances. They are songs for the church, birthed out of the church, to be used to worship the living God. Let’s see a rock star do that.

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