

WINTER JAM 2011 TOUR SPECTACULAR GEARS UP FOR BIGGEST YEAR YET, BRINGING 10 TOP ARTISTS TO 47 CITIES



NASHVILLE, Tenn.— Christian music's largest annual tour, the record-breaking Winter Jam Tour Spectacular, is set to return bigger than ever in 2011, it was announced yesterday. Produced by Premier Productions and presented by Holt International, the tour will feature the most artists and dates in its 16-year history.

Hosted by GRAMMY®-nominated NewSong, the Winter Jam 2011 Tour Spectacular will also feature Newsboys; David Crowder Band; Kutless; Francesca Battistelli; RED; KJ-52, and guest speaker Tony Nolan. In addition, the show includes a Pre-Jam Party presented by the American Bible Society with Sidewalk Prophets, Chris August and Chris Sligh.

"It's amazing and humbling to see how God has continued to bless the Winter Jam Tour over all these years," says NewSong's Eddie Carswell. "We specifically created and designed this tour to impact the lives of others for the sake of the Gospel. Our prayer is that God will continue to use Winter Jam for His glory and honor."

"This year's tour will be unlike any other Winter Jam in history," says Roy Morgan, owner, Premier Productions, producer of Winter Jam. "Winter Jam 2011 will have tons of surprises that no one is expecting. You will not want to miss this. Also, if someone has never experienced a Winter Jam event before, then this is the year to come."

Kicking-off January 7 in Chattanooga, Tennessee, the tour will stop in Dallas; Atlanta; Cincinnati; Oklahoma City; Nashville, Tennessee; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Des Moines, Iowa; Kansas City, Missouri; Charlotte, North Carolina; and Baton Rouge, Louisiana, among other cities, before concluding April 3 in Peoria, Illinois.

Presented by Holt International, The Winter Jam 2011 Tour Spectacular is sponsored by the American Bible Society, www.HearItFirst.com, Camp Electric, Premier Christian Cruises, Wayne E. Bailey Produce and Xtreme Conferences.

This year's Winter Jam was the #1 tour in America in the first quarter and landed at #2 on Pollstar's 2010 Worldwide First Quarter Ticket Sales "Top 100 Tours" chart, with attendance in excess of 400,000 people. Winter Jam 2010 also saw an estimated 74,000 people make decisions for Christ, and facilitated more than 10,000 sponsorship commitments to adoption and child welfare organization Holt International to help meet the needs of orphaned children around the world.

Created by NewSong in 1995, the group hosts the multi-artist tour each year. The Gospel Music Association presented its prestigious Impact Award to the Winter Jam Tour Spectacular in 2009, in recognition of the tour's continued success.

NewSong's 28 years in ministry have yielded 17 albums; 20 #1 singles; a Dove Award; and a GRAMMY® Award nomination, among numerous other achievements. The band's latest recording, *Give Yourself Away*, released last fall.

For a complete tour itinerary and further information, visit www.jamtour.com. Artist line-up may vary in select cities.

NEWSBOYS BORN AGAIN

Genesis, Petra, Van Halen. They all did it. Many legendary acts have introduced a new lead singer amidst their career without missing a beat. So when newsboys announced that dc Talk vocalist Michael Tait would take over for exiting front man Peter Furler—after a natural period of surprise—the band and its fans alike began to relish the positives and possibilities of this fresh start. And all signs would point to a phrase loaded with creative and spiritual significance that has become the title of newsboys' next album, *Born Again*, releasing this summer on June 8th.

Of course, Tait hardly needs an introduction. While newsboys charted 25 No. 1 pop hits, sold six million records, and helped Christian music gain mainstream acceptance, dc Talk was doing the same with GRAMMY-winning sets like *Free at Last* and *Jesus Freak*. Combining the strengths of these two groups now is clearly good reason for excitement.

"I can't believe Michael was available," says drummer Duncan Phillips of the soulful dreadlocked rocker whose artistic presence pervades new singles like "I'll Be" and the extraordinary title track. "His vocal range and style allow newsboys to musically explore avenues we haven't in the past."

"Tait is great for us because he's a real team player and brings a lot of enthusiasm to the mix of personalities," explains guitarist Jody Davis, who also feels a sense of rebirth, having rejoined newsboys in 2009 following an earlier ten-year membership.

"We're all getting a new lease on life from this," believes keyboardist Jeff Frankenstein. "The core of the band—myself, Jody, and Duncan—is reunited. We all first joined at the same time for the *Going Public* record. And now we get to work with Mike, an amazing singer. It's providential. Looking back, I couldn't see things happening any other way."

Michael agrees. Although he was working with big names on a solo project in Los Angeles when newsboys called, after a few great concerts together, he knew the invitation to help extend their unique musical mission was just what his thirsty soul needed.

"I'd walk off stage and just start bawling at how the Spirit was moving," he admits. "Making music with Jody, Jeff, and Duncan fits like a glove. On so many levels, there really is a sense of being born again."

As audiences embrace the rock energy Michael adds to the show—and smile at how he has memorized newsboys' back catalog of often-quirky lyrics ("Breakfast' just about killed me," he says)—Michael knows the next big hurdle is to bring out a strong new record that bridges then and now. Remarkably, *Born Again* makes it all sound so easy.

The fun and fiery "Boys Light Up" is destined to be the album's most celebrated track. A biographical anthem of reignited belief and purpose penned with longtime newsboys collaborator Steve Taylor, it puts every transitional issue anyone might raise to rest.

I was feeling all overcome / Had a faith gone dim and then some / Got a call from a band of brothers . . . / All the doubters I heard them say "now the band's gonna fade away" / But the 'boys are back for a second act / No excuses. We're lighting fuses.

"It's a common theme running through newsboys," Duncan says of the ultra-rhythmic cut with a chorus that declares: *When the boys light up you know Who gets the praise, Who owns the show*. "It's like a new version of 'Shine,' another song of encouragement."

Stretching out from that welcome familiarity, radio-ready mid-tempo ballads “On Your Knees Again” and “I’ll Be” showcase what’s noticeably different about newsboys today: story-led tunes with melodies that soar higher and stronger than before coupled with the more distinguishable piano and guitar performances from Jeff and Jody.

“Jeff Frankenstein is appropriately named, that’s for sure,” Michael says. “He is really in his lab working . . . one of the best players I’ve heard. You feel his notes. And Jody . . . in a band with just one guitarist, you’ve got to be on. He’s electrifying.”

Echoing the need for a Savior expressed in the previous selections, worshipful songs like “We Remember” (written by Audio Adrenaline’s Mark Stuart) and “Running to You” emphasize the sea change that must occur in a relationship with God: *More than just emotion, my broken heart has chosen / Jesus, I’m running to you.*

It’s that key choice that fuels the contagious passion found on *Born Again*’s heaviest hits. Crowd-rallying “One Shot” is where Michael’s childhood dreams (*All I wanted was to do the rock thing*) meet the newfound joys of being center stage with newsboys, helping spread their kingdom cause even further (*We say there’s one way / when push comes to shove we’re gonna sing of His love*).

Already a live highlight, “Born Again” is the mountainous title track where newsboys become a band completely renewed: Duncan dents up his kit, Jody makes a distorted guitar sound rough and righteous at once, Jeff adds support vocals to his cinematic synthesizers, and Michael definitively emotes his testimony.

“We’ve all believed in lies at some point. I had some prodigal years in the past,” he says. “But I hope the song encourages others to make the same decision I did: *I’m giving Him the best of everything that’s left of the life inside this man / I’ve been born again.*”

“Born Again” is also the album’s first video and the perfect sonic match for footage of Michael, Duncan, Jeff, and Jody building houses in Mexico’s poverty stricken Baja Peninsula. The group has served the people in this Third World setting for many years constructing hundreds of homes, and plans to invite fans there for future ministry efforts.

In all, newsboys collectively view *Born Again* as representative of everything the band has gone through this past year—standing at a crossroads where human reason might suggest closing up shop, but bold faith would compel these four men to trust in God’s plan for them and their listeners through the power of music.

“Music is such a powerful medium,” concludes Michael. “For me, the only way to someone’s heart is through the headphones. Music can change the conscience of man. It dares to ask questions like: *Why am I here? Can I be greater? How do I move forward?*”

Thankfully, newsboys asked those questions of themselves, and they’ve been born again.

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www.newsboys.com

Feb. 2010

DAVID CROWDER*BAND CHURCH MUSIC

Biography

DAVID CROWDER*BAND, the Dove Award-winning six-piece, crafts compelling, inimitably progressive electronic rock. Think Radiohead meets Linkin Park. Compare that description with the fact that some even call them a worship band. The interesting thing is that you wouldn't know it at all by listening to the band's ambient and ethereal forthcoming record **CHURCH MUSIC** but CROWDER wants to be upfront about it.

"The one thing non-Christians get perturbed about is that no one is being straightforward with the conversation," CROWDER explains. "And that's when they feel like they've been had and go, 'I fell in love with this band and now I find out they're just trying to subvert my thinking.' This project says what it is. It's CHURCH MUSIC and if you're straightforward with it, there's beauty that's available to people who may not profess the same beliefs."

CHURCH MUSIC--the DAVID CROWDER*BAND's fifth studio offering since the solidification of their lineup back in 2000--will hit stores September 22 through EMI's sixstepsrecords/Sparrow Records imprint. The band have easily sold more than one million albums to date including 2007's Remedy, which debuted at #1 on the Christian charts and notched a #22 opening on the Billboard Top 200. "This one's a monster, man," CROWDER enthuses, "and lengthy!" The album's packed with 73 continuous minutes of music, inspired by the likes of Portishead and Sigur Rós. "It's our stimulus package," the frontman and occasional Theremin player jokes. "We're doing our part."

Aptly titled, the band hopes their self-produced recording will prompt listeners to recognize the continual evolvement of music within the Church as well as transport them into an awareness that we exist within the very presence of God, therefore allowing CHURCH MUSIC to happen anywhere. "I hope this album serves as a reminder of music within the Church, of its richness and its broadness, and the tension that exists in using elements of cultural language to express our collective experience and also still remain a transformative presence that is set apart," admits band frontman David Crowder.

One of CROWDER's favorite selections from CHURCH MUSIC is "God Almighty, None Compares," because he loves "the guitar harmony...the guitarmony, if you will, and shredding is involved, which always makes me smile. It doesn't wind up in our music very often but this song just seemed to beg for it, so we obliged." For the epic "Eastern Hymn," which is the rest of the band's favorite song on the disc, CROWDER commissioned the translation of an ancient Chinese prayer book which he'd found last summer while the band was on the Passion World Tour, and portions of the translated tome appear in the song's chorus.

The track "Oh, Happiness" sounds like it could have sprung from the minds of the MGMT lads and, "has a lot of sunshine in it," CROWDER enthuses. Then, you get to the vocoder-heavy title track, which is "as close to Studio 54 as we could get," the frontman says with a chuckle. "We wanted to put a party from Studio 54 on the record and I know its going to be really fun live. That song is sort of our pronouncement that CHURCH MUSIC helps us realign ourselves to some of the more beautiful things about our

existence.” The band even tackles a cover on the disc that has to be heard to be believed: Flyleaf’s “All Around Me.” Flyleaf lead singer Lacey Mosely also appears on the album, singing background vocals on various tracks, as well as the Dupree sisters from Easley.

“The label ‘Christian music’ doesn’t always come with high expectations as far as music is concerned,” CROWDER says. “When people hear the sonics of this band, it’s both confusing and freeing for them. They know where to place you because you’re not trying to get away from labeling yourself in a spiritual sort of context. But the words ‘Church music’ stir up images of good old Americana, and even stodgy music, but if you have encountered our music, you know that there are a lot of cultural and current influences in it, so to put this music with that term does a number of things. It helps people understand what our intent is and it lets people understand that the idea of CHURCH MUSIC is really broad and diverse and to me, that’s really exciting.”

For those unfamiliar with the DAVID CROWDER*BAND, who was named MSN.com’s 2006 Artist of the Year, the group’s earliest beginnings trace back to the 1990s when CROWDER left his hometown of Texarkana for Waco, Texas, attended Baylor University, and founded the University Baptist Church. CROWDER--who has authored two books, 2005’s Praise Habit: Finding God in Sunsets and Sushi and 2006’s Everybody Wants to Go to Heaven, but Nobody Wants to Die or (The Eschatology of Bluegrass)--remains a Waco fixture, where he’s still involved with the church’s student-saturated congregation.

CROWDER expressed interest in music early on, banging away on the family’s piano as a child. After a while, the noise started sounding melodious, and CROWDER’s mother signed him up for lessons. “I kicked and screamed the whole time but I’m glad in retrospect,” CROWDER explains. “And I picked up a guitar in college and couldn’t put it down. I’ve always loved music and it just feels like something I’d be doing, whether it paid the bills or not.”

The band may bear Crowder’s name, but all six members of the group are involved in the creative process. “We look at music as a conversation, and so all of us have input and participate in the conversation, and to make room for all six voices, you wind up with lots of layering,” CROWDER says. “For me, I get bored very easily with music. I like music you can come back to and revisit, where each listen, there’s a new discovery. That’s been attractive and exciting for us, to try to create things like the stuff we love, stuff that’s enjoyable on multiple listens.”

Rounded out by guitarists **JACK PARKER** and **MARK WALDORP**, bassist **MIKE DODSON**, drummer **JEREMY BUSH** and electronic violinist **MIKE HOGAN**, the DAVID CROWDER*BAND plan to take CHURCH MUSIC on the road this fall. Rather than pack out huge venues like New York’s Hammerstein Ballroom and Los Angeles’ Wiltern Theatre like they did in 2007 on the band’s sold-out, 29-city “Remedy” Club tour, the boys will be taking a more title-appropriate route, playing mostly churches across the country, furthermore proving that CHURCH MUSIC can happen everywhere from club stages to church pews.

“I think that’s what we have had to struggle with, throughout the history of church music, is figuring out how to maintain distance from culture and at the same time, embrace culture and I feel like when the church’s music has been most effective in expressing that experience has been when it has embraced popular art within culture, and that’s what we’re attempting to do here,” says CROWDER. “I really think music is one of those unique things that we have in the material world that lets us get a glimpse that there might be something bigger.”

Kutless | *It Is Well*

With two million records sold across its first five efforts, Oregon rock band Kutless had already made a strong name for itself. But the late 2009 release of *It Is Well*, the quintet's second worship set, continues to be a complete game changer. On one hand, the edgy act's first No. 1 adult contemporary single, "What Faith Can Do," is remarkable, as are the rave reviews ("Cleverly arranged covers, soul-catching originals" —Christian Music Today; "Perfectly fitted guitar work" —allmusic; "No tracks worth skipping" —Jesus Freak Hideout). But even more important is how this batch of songs reflects the ways these men are growing in spirit, in creativity, and into one of today's most exciting, thoughtful rock-meets-worship collectives.

Indicative of the band's deep sense of awareness, Kutless approached the making of *It Is Well* with several questions: *Should we make another worship record just because the first one was popular? Does the world need another worship album? Can we do something unique?* Front man Jon Micah Sumrall says it was his pastor who gave clarity to the matter—in a conversation that began when he asked the singer, "So, when are you guys going to do another worship record?"

"I told him how we didn't want to have the wrong heart behind our next step. Then he asked what our goal was, which is always to reach as many people as we can with Christ's love," explains Sumrall. "So, he asked which album had helped us do that best, the answer being our first worship record, *Strong Tower*, without a doubt. His last question was obvious by that point: *Why wouldn't you do something like that again?*"

As that tension resolved, Kutless bass player Dave Luetkenhoelter says, "We let go of some of the expectations among ourselves and also realized the heart determines what is worship, not necessarily musical style . . . This isn't about who we are but who God is. We decided to just go in, make the music that was on our hearts, and see what it sounded like when it was done."

It Is Well sounds like a band coming into its own, discovering that compelling place where its originally more aggressive playing stays relevant as it is tempered by classic song-crafting sensibilities and learning to pour the right energy into the right moments. The opening title track is a prime example, a Millennial generation's electrified take on Horatio Spafford's 1800s hymn that manages to respect both eras. Kutless guitarist Nick De Partee credits album co-producer Dave Lubben (also a worship leader) with bringing out the best in each player.

"Dave made sure that Jon Micah meant every word he sang and that we meant every note we played," he says. "People can hear that type of thing, whether they are fully aware of it or not."

The media has certainly noticed the excellence pulsing through each cut on *It Is Well*. Hailing the group sing-along (rounded out by drummer Jeff Gilbert and guitarist James Mead) that launches a muscular cover of Passion worshiper Charlie Hall's "Give Us Clean Hands," Christian Music Today says Kutless gives the song "new life and an exciting way for worship leaders to interpret this tune." Other modern praises—a Keith Green medley ("Redeemer"), Vineyard's "Hungry," and an amped up "God of Wonders"—are likewise elevated by the band's appreciable vigor.

As moving and memorable as those reinterpretations are, the original compositions on *It Is Well* are an even greater testament to the maturation happening within Kutless. New pop and rock radio singles "Everything I Need" (written by Sumrall and Lubben) and "Remember Me" (by De

Partee and John Howard), possess lyrical and stylistic strengths that should instantly resonate with intended audiences. The former's 3/4 time signature and soaring vocals are comparable to Chris Tomlin, while the latter, told from the striking perspective of the repentant thief on the cross beside Jesus, grabs the listener in a gritty sort of Nickelback way. And CCM says it best when describing the De Partee/Phil Wickham-penned "Amazed" as "a slow-to-mid-tempo anthem that holds a melody so good, you wonder if it's an established worship song that you just happened to miss."

Beyond the band's brightening internal artistic merits, it's inspiring to hear the Kutless members talk about what they are learning outside of their own instincts—the lessons that transcend any given genre to improve both creative and ministry impact. They've watched gospel-based acts like Israel Houghton and aspired to bring similar passion and dedicated musicianship to their own rock concerts. They've spoken with recent tour mates Casting Crowns, adopting its practice of walking through the empty performance halls ahead of show time, touching the seats and praying for those who will be in attendance. And there were plenty of insights gained from working with veteran producer Brown Bannister (Amy Grant, MercyMe) on *It Is Well's* standout hit, "What Faith Can Do," written by outside friends Scott Davis and Scott Krippayne.

"That song came in at the last minute, and we spent three days in Nashville tracking it with Brown, who is such a gentleman and a brilliant musician," Luetkenhoelter recalls. "Kind of like what Dave Lubben did, he would ask—*Is that the best you can do?*—after every take and really helped us understand how to make the tune resonate with the listener."

Sumrall likes how "What Faith Can Do" supports the worship theme throughout *It Is Well* and felt from the start it was the right song for Kutless in this season, an affirmation of the band's decision to make the music God placed on its heart. It certainly addresses the ultimate goal of reaching the world with a message of hope; industry tracking indicates the tune was making more than eight million impressions per week while atop the charts, where more of the album's stirring compositions are likely headed.

"We're getting a flood of e-mail from people about how the song is impacting their lives," concludes Jon Micah. "Our continuing prayer is for the entire record to point to Christ and remind us all that there is more to worship than worship albums. We must live a life of worship."

Well said.

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FRANCESCA BATTISTELLI

MY PAPER HEART

“We must be willing to let go of the life we have planned, so as to have the life that is waiting for us.”—E.M. Forester

So, what do you want to be when you grow up?

It’s a question that takes many people years and years of trial and error and self-discovery to figure out. But for singer/songwriter Francesca Battistelli, her mind was made up when she was only six years old. After seeing “The Secret Garden” on Broadway with her parents, the decision was ultimately a no-brainer. “There was just something about live theater—especially musical theater—that has always resonated with me,” Francesca says. “So I thought that was it. I was going to be Mary Lennox in ‘The Secret Garden.’”

Of course for anyone who knew her family, Francesca’s passion for life on the stage wasn’t all that surprising, given her mom and dad’s extensive theater background. In fact, they met when her dad was the assistant conductor for the national tour of “The King and I,” while her mom played Anna, the show’s female lead opposite Yul Brynner.

Like any girl with dreams of grandeur, Francesca knew carving out her own path in the ultra-competitive arts world wasn’t going to be easy. But with her Broadway aspirations in the back of her mind and an insatiable work ethic, she stayed focused. Instead of signing up for the typical extracurriculars like cheerleading or sports, Francesca’s life revolved around dance classes and musical theater training.

And when Francesca was 15, she put her skills to good use in an all-girl mainstream pop group in Orlando, an experience that helped pave the way for what she does today. “We traveled all over and performed at Hard Rock Live and House of Blues a couple of times,” Francesca recalls. “It was good for what it was because it tied together two things I loved: singing and dancing.”

But when the gig eventually ended, Francesca says she was thankful for an opportunity to clear her head. “Not long after, I recharged my batteries by going to this youth ministry that I absolutely loved,” Francesca shares. “It was there where the Lord really captured my heart for Christian music. I started playing guitar and really longed to bring something authentic to the scene that even non-Christians could listen to.”

Armed with her passion for writing and hope for a hurting world, Francesca put pen to paper and crafted heartfelt, personal reflections on life and faith for what’s now her major-label debut, *My Paper Heart*. Inspired by everyone from the jazz greats her dad introduced her to as a kid, to contemporaries like John Mayer, Sara Bareilles and Nichole Nordeman, Francesca set out to write “soulful pop music that someone pops in the morning and says, ‘Now I can start my day, I feel encouraged.’”

One of the first tracks Francesca wrote upon moving to Nashville, her first single “I’m Letting Go,” not only highlights Francesca’s expressive vocals but her overarching desire to encourage her peers not to settle for anything less than what God has for them.

“I’d just moved to Nashville, and I was sort of letting go of everything that someone can at 22 years old,” Francesca shares. “And it’s far better and different in more ways than I could’ve expected. There’s a line in the song that says ‘I feel like I’m falling/And that’s what it’s like to

believe.' Walking in faith is like free-falling, yet that's the best place to be. But so many of us are afraid to do that."

On the title track, Francesca tackles another universal fear—the fragility of the human heart. "This has been the hardest, scariest, most rewarding year of my life. I have known sorrow, and I have known joy," she shares. "God has spoken quietly the words of His heart, and He has shown me colors in the grayest hues of winter. He has sung songs over me in solitude, and He has never let go of my fragile, paper heart. He knows every corner of it—the tattered, torn, and untouched places. He knows the songs that move it, the words that pierce it, and the people He uses to change it. I am forever safe in His hands."

And while pouring out your heart doesn't always come easy for some, the songwriting process has been both cathartic and fun for Francesca. Describing it as "the most fun she's ever had professionally," Francesca's enthusiasm can't help but find its way into her music. In fact, whether she's talking about the spirited, funk-laden title track or the buoyant, accept-yourself-as-you-are anthem "Free to Be Me," Francesca bookends her commentary with "I really love this song. It's so much fun to sing." And that pervasive joy, along with Francesca's adventurous musicianship and relatable songwriting make *My Paper Heart* an impressive debut.

But even more important to Francesca than offering up a collection of catchy songs for the masses is speaking a message of truth and purpose.

"Ultimately, I want to be an encouragement as an artist and a fellow believer," Francesca says. "The Lord has continually called me to do things that are outside my comfort zone, whether it was accompanying myself on guitar for the first time in front of seasoned players or packing up and moving to Nashville last year knowing hardly anybody. Still, He's never left me, and He constantly shows me that it's worth it. I have parents who pray and encourage me to be bold and to take bold steps for Christ. I don't think that's common enough in the Christian culture. We have these big dreams, but many aren't willing to take the steps to go after them. Yet this is the moment. We're not promised tomorrow. So today's the day."

NEWSONG

A Grace-Filled History

Remember the days when Grammy-nominated and Dove Award-winning artist NewSong merely thrived in the blooming music industry? Those decades when recording acts toured from coast to coast to generate album sales? But then the digital music revolution turned conventional thinking on its head. Today, instead of touring to move units, most artists release new music to drive fans to their concerts. And in this new era where tours rule the day, who is one of Christian music's primary gatekeepers and most influential bands?

NewSong.

But make no mistake; this group's remarkable story is more about faithfulness and the favor of God than one band's daring innovation. In fact, the most pivotal moments in NewSong's career repeatedly begged the question: What was NewSong thinking?

Even the act's first major label deal still raises eyebrows. For that matter, one might have asked what the Word Records label group was thinking, taking a chance on a vocal ensemble from Valdosta, Georgia. When Eddie Carswell and Billy Goodwin, who continue to lead the evolving group, started out in 1981, neither of them imagined NewSong would repeatedly outdo itself for so many years and counting. After all, with the exception of U2, what breakout band sees its third decade eclipse its first two?

"I attribute that to God having His hand on us and helping us in spite of ourselves," says Eddie. "We've tried to be faithful to our mission – to tell people about our relationship with Christ – since the beginning. I remember thinking, even before we started NewSong, that it'd be great to have a group of real guys that you could relate to, get up on stage, hold an audience's attention with great music and then share how to come to know Christ. Even though we love the music, the ministry part of what we do is the main focus."

Indeed, try getting Eddie or Billy to reflect on NewSong's notable success – the 20 #1 radio singles, numerous awards, and national television appearances are the tip of the iceberg – and they'll immediately take you back to what matters most, their mission. Even from the outside looking in, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to see that a heart for evangelism has always defined what they do. And that, perhaps more than anything, makes their repeated achievements – including some absolute stunners – so extraordinary.

For instance, consider NewSong's most enduring recordings. This is a band that could fill two entire albums with its #1 singles alone. Yet the group's two most requested, most performed songs, "The Christmas Shoes" and "Arise My Love," were never major hits at Christian radio – not even close. And you could write a book about "The Christmas Shoes." (Or make a movie ... or, hey, both.)

Believe it or not, as an afterthought, NewSong recorded what would become not only the biggest song of its career, but one of America's most beloved Christmas standards. Mainstream stations took the song to #1 on Billboard's Adult Contemporary chart, and the crossover hit, which also invaded the country charts, touched off a dramatic domino effect that continues to this day. Highlights include a series of New York Times best-selling novels by Donna VanLiere, and two top-rated CBS television movies based on the books and featuring music from NewSong. (CBS' *The Christmas Blessing* was television's most-watched movie in 2005.) VanLiere's fifth novel in the series,

The Christmas Secret, just hit stores in October and the third book-based movie, *The Christmas Hope*, will air this holiday season.

Of course, the annual hoopla surrounding NewSong's seasonal recordings has called for a major Christmas tour each year, and the band has been happy to oblige. After all, nobody does tours like NewSong. When the group introduced its annual "Winter Jam Tour Spectacular" in 1995, NewSong started to change the public face of Christian music. The mega-event on wheels has become one of the gospel music world's biggest annual tours, with some history-making moments along the way—like setting a record in 1999 for the largest attended indoor event in South Carolina's history.

"We wanted to do a concert in Greenville, South Carolina, and had already played the larger churches in the area, so we asked the promoter about the BI-LO Center," recalls Eddie. "It was fairly short notice, and he explained the only dates he had open were in January. The promoter also said he had never filled the 15,000-seat venue with a Christian event, and that a January date wouldn't give him enough lead time to sell tickets in advance." Well, that settled that. "Yep, we told him we didn't want to sell tickets anyway and decided to take donations at the door," Eddie says. "The night of the concert, when they finally closed the doors, they had to turn 2,000 people away. The place was jam-packed – it was an unbelievable night."

To this day, NewSong's multi-artist, ticketless concerts give thousands the opportunity not only to hear incredible music but, of course, to also hear the Gospel message. During 2009's Tour, more than 69,000 Winter Jam attendees made either a first-time commitment to follow Christ or rededicated their lives to Him. More than 335,000 fans attended the 35 dates of the 2009 Spectacular, ranking it among the largest tours of any kind during the year's first quarter, according to Pollstar.

Among its most impressive feats, NewSong's accessible brand of modern pop has long held the rapt attention of diverse audiences, which include pre-teens, grandparents, and everyone in between. In addition to founding the "Winter Jam Tour Spectacular," NewSong organizes another series of annual events, which specifically target youth. Today, the band hosts five Xtreme Conferences each year with as many as 25,000-plus youth in attendance.

NewSong's burden for youth extends beyond its primary goals of evangelism and encouraging discipleship, especially where abandoned and underprivileged children are concerned. For many years, the band partnered with World Vision, the evangelical relief organization dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities worldwide in tackling poverty and injustice. Then, in 2006, NewSong decided to focus its social justice efforts specifically on helping orphans through adoption. "We partnered with Holt International, which specializes in adoption and child welfare around the world," explains Eddie. "By that time, Holt had already placed more than 50,000 children in loving homes, and had done all that under the radar. It's been a real honor to come alongside them and tell others about them through our tours." Winter Jam 2009, alone, resulted in the sponsorship of more than 4,600 children through Holt.

With an incomparable career still on the rise after all these years, the temptation to stay in your comfort zone must be substantial. But this is NewSong we're talking about so ... what comfort zone?

Not only is this band not playing it safe, NewSong shuffled the entire deck even as they prepared to release the long-awaited new album, *Give Yourself Away*. For starters, the band recently launched its own record label, His Honor Music. "We've had fantastic label partners in the past," says Eddie, "but this gives us even more flexibility to do things on occasion that are a little more radical."

Radical? Sounds like fun. And NewSong is working with innovative producer Charlie Peacock (Switchfoot, Ten Out of Tenn) for the first time, too. "There's a real sense of anticipation as we enter this new place in our career. None of us ever dreamed in a million years that God would do all this through NewSong," Eddie says. "The long and short of it is that He has blessed us in the midst of our weakness and here we are now 28 years later, and God's still using us. Isn't that crazy?"

Crazy good. And while there's much to celebrate in this fresh season for NewSong, the major change that excites fans the most is the recent return of beloved lead singer Russ Lee. The singer/songwriter extraordinaire who captivated audiences during his first tenure (1993-2000) reunites in splendid fashion on the band's new album.

While the groups that started with NewSong are either done or are having their occasional reunion tours, Eddie, Billy, Russ and company continue to nurture creativity by moving beyond conventional thinking. Or, as Eddie humbly puts it, "The innovative ideas that mark NewSong's history don't seem profound at the time; they just come about naturally."

Thankfully for everyone involved, NewSong thinks the way it does.