

mark roach *every reason why*

Conventional wisdom dictates that an artist's bio must include: a) a brief history of the artist's notable life events, b) a running list of the artist's major accomplishments, and c) a testament to the artist's current and future greatness (appropriately packaged in witty repartee complete with humorous, self-deprecating remarks thrown in for good measure) all designed to convince the reader that said artist is brilliant, successful, and in the case of artist/worshippers, considerably more spiritually attuned than the average church-goer. In other words, an artist's bio is designed to create the impression that the artist in question is a rock star, that mythical, larger-than-life creature that once roamed the amphitheatres of the world, tearing out hotel walls and demanding idiosyncratic items like a bowl full of green M&Ms before each performance. Let it here be said that Mark Roach is not a rock star, and this bio has very little to do with conventional wisdom. It has much more to do with communication – a two-way communication called worship.

“The Webster's definition of worship is a very one-sided thing,” Mark muses. “You bow down before someone and tell them how great they are and it stops there. But the worship of our Creator is a two-way conversation. When you participate in this kind of worship, you are changed by it.”

While Mark joyfully concedes the importance of recognizing and proclaiming God's sovereignty, and extols the benefits of declaring the attributes of God, he insists the act of worship should also include speaking with God on a more personal, emotional, and vulnerable level. “The Psalmists exulted in the glory of God, but they also implored Him to crush their enemies,” he explains. “They praised Him, but they also questioned Him. Sometimes they simply begged Him to just show up in their lives. Those are intimate, vulnerable prayers. It's okay to speak to God from an emotional perspective. That is a valid part of worship that I think we sometimes miss.”

Yes, Mark Roach is a worship leader. Or an artist/worshiper. Or a worship artist. Or whatever label you want to slap on a singer/songwriter who creates emotion-laden, contemporary hymns that grace the radio airwaves; who, at the same time, leads a local congregation into the Throne Room each Sunday. But it was not always so.

Before Mark was a worship leader (or artist/worshiper, etc) he was simply a songwriter. He started writing songs when he was still in elementary school, honed his craft throughout junior high and by the time he graduated high school he was convinced of his calling: he would write songs. Songs about life. Songs about love. Songs about... girls. But probably not songs about God.

Sure, Mark had a rudimentary knowledge of God. And even though he found salvation while in high school, he certainly didn't have the background of your average worship leader. He was no preacher's kid.

“I grew up with something of an ‘After School Special’ of a childhood,” he quips, fulfilling the ‘witty repartee’ requirement. “My parents divorced when I was five and I didn't grow up with that foundational faith so many contemporary worship leaders have. Coming to faith was a longer process for me. But all of those experiences have shaped me in a unique way, and I can draw on all those life experiences. It's not better or worse than people who have grown up in the church – it's just different.”

It was during Mark's college days that he encountered people who had ‘the Glow.’

“Salvation was evident in their demeanor,” he says. “It was something I wanted; the passion, the peace, the control, you know...the Glow. I attached myself to them and I felt a rebirth in my passion for following Christ. I started writing songs that had an underlying Christian theme, but I still wanted to write for the masses.”

Mark’s brief foray into the Nashville music scene yielded little success, and eventually convinced him the ‘industry’ was not something he was supposed to be involved with. Ironically, while he was busy trying to earn a living by writing wholesome pop songs, he was experiencing the power of modern worship for the first time in his life.

“It was a really tough, broken time in my life,” Mark confesses. “But sitting there in the congregation with my head in my hands, I discovered what could be done to a heart and soul in one moment in the midst of worship. I felt the enveloping presence of God. I wrote the song, “Surrounded,” about that experience of being in the midst of worshipping believers and, in the most tangible way I have ever felt, being absolutely surrounded by God’s grace and presence.”

It has been said that there is a time in every artist’s career when he stops trying to be the artists he loves, and instead becomes the artist he was meant to be. For Mark, that moment came when he decided to lay down his musical career, abandon Nashville, and return home to St. Louis. Before long he found himself hired as the worship leader for Morning Star Church in O’Fallon, Missouri, a ministry in its infancy that had yet to hold its first service. Mark rolled up his sleeves, assembled a worship team, and wrote his first worship song, “Steps of Faith,” for the inaugural service.

Mark’s proficiency as a worship leader, as well as the congregation, have both exploded since those early days in 1999. As his music continues to impact congregations around the country and around the world, Mark finds himself increasingly in demand at worship conferences, festivals, and concerts. But while he recognizes the inevitability of celebrity, he neither fears nor eschews rock star status.

“If there is anything about me or my music that is marketable, as long as I am stewarding it to draw people into God’s presence and to draw them into relationship with Christ, I think not only is there no harm in it, but that is what needs to be happening in entertainment,” he says. “My job as a worship leader is to create an atmosphere that is conducive to that two-way communication between the congregation and God. I think that anything less than great music falls short of that. Mediocrity doesn’t move people. If you really want to lift people out of their lives and take them on a journey, you have to do that with an elevated sense of purpose with your absolute best effort. God deserves that. He deserves nothing less.”

Every Reason Why, Mark’s debut project effectively illustrates his point. From the opening bombast of “A Thousand Hallelujahs” to the closing solitude of “Foundations,” this album says what Mark wants to say, as directly as he can say it. It’s an examination of the life of a people called to worship a magnificent Creator...and of the two-way conversation that such worship evokes. They are songs of life and songs of love; songs of awe and adoration; songs of emotion and vulnerability. They were written to engage a congregation in conversation with God. They are songs for the body of Christ. Now they are yours.