

Helping Kids

Rock



When I was young, I could easily tell the difference between Christian music and rock music. Christian music was played mostly at church on organs and pianos, was led by one person up front (usually waving his hands as if the congregation was a choir) with the people singing from hymnals. Rock music was heard on the radio or on your record player. Into my teenage years a few Christian bands developed and began using guitars or drums and an occasional keyboard. I remember looking for Christian records at a bookstore and choosing to buy one if I saw somebody was actually playing drums on it! At a camp or coffeehouse people began singing more contemporary Christian music played with guitars. “Amazing Grace” to the tune of “House of the Rising Sun” became our anthem. Along came cassette and eight track tapes. The music industry had effectively spread beyond the radio, concert hall, and the church.

Personal listening of music entered the arena in the late ‘70’s when those big headphones were introduced. With those I could enter my own music world. They even invented round, cocoon-like chairs with speakers for those who wanted the “cave” experience.

By the mid ‘80’s, music could be heard on cassette tapes played in a “WalkMan” – and soon we had moved to CD’s, internet streaming music, and then the tidal wave of iPods, iTunes, and other

MP3 formats. Music had invaded every corner of life. People could easily create their own mix and personal playlists and take music with them wherever they went.

Walk around the busy sidewalks of your downtowns, malls, and airports and there we see hundreds and thousands of people with ear buds of all shapes and sizes. Most people live their lives with a soundtrack in their ears.

HOW DO WE CAPITALIZE ON THIS LOVE FOR MUSIC?

If we were to ask youth leaders, “How do you use music in your ministry?” most would respond, “We have a great worship band.” While this is a powerful way to use music, it can no longer be the only way. In the early ‘90’s it was possible to use the strategy, “bring in a band and they will come.” We are now in a different day. The use of music requires creativity, diversity, discernment, and spiritual wisdom.

There is one myth we must explode: all youth connect equally with God through the leadership of a good worship band. (If the worship band is not good, we are into a whole other discussion!) The truth is that our attraction and connection with music is subjective. Everyone has an opinion on style and taste of music. Musicians and non-

As Much As You Help Them Praise

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musicians alike are unified in the fact they have an opinion! Where there are opinions, one can expect a variety of needs concerning worship to and engagement with God. Just as a good teacher understands that there are diverse learning styles in one's teaching environment, we ought to recognize the different ways youth may respond to music in the life of our ministry.

With this awareness what are some ways to help youth engage in worship and spiritual growth through the power of music? Here are a few suggestions:

- **Listening Party** – In my high school days, a new record album would often bring people together for a listening party. In this day of downloads we can have new music in seconds. What about scheduling an event on the day new music, sacred or secular, is released? You could critique it and talk through the themes of the lyrics. This is a great tool for helping your youth think critically through what they hear, and it gives them tools for discernment.
- **Lyric Study** – Use a song, Christian or secular, as a part of your teaching. In your planning, study the lyrics, identify the theme, and develop a Bible study to communicate a spiritual truth. Interlinc offers many great resources through their *Youth Leaders Only* and *Music Video Loop* studies.

re:Tuned is a section of the YLO that takes secular songs and looks for the spiritual truths or lies in the lyrics. **re:Tuned** is a great discussion guide.

- **Musical Potluck** – Instead of the traditional live worship band, pre-select five or six people to bring a song on CD or MP3 that they would describe as helping them to connect and draw closer to God. Have the lyrics available and ask youth to introduce the song before listening together.
- **Music Library** – Get your youth into Christian music by letting them “taste” it for free. Interlinc offers a great resource in their quarterly *Youth Leaders Only* boxes. The initial cost looks scary, but when averaged out over the year you can't beat the deal.
- **Music Tweets, Facebook Posts, Blogs** – Use social networks to begin discussions about new songs. Feel free to share your opinion on certain songs and get youth to respond. This is another training ground to help your students grow in their faith through the medium of music.

This list is a start. Now it is your turn to rock on!

