


How To Talk To Parents About Music: A Students Perspective

by Mark Pittman

© interlinc
All Rights Reserved

 **interlinc.**
maximizing music and media resources in student ministry
interlinc-online.com
800-725-3300

When we talk to parents about secular music often we run into predictable responses: fear, misunderstanding of the real issues, lack of communication and unrealistic expectations.

I am standing a “Toys R Us” store looking at Star Wars action figures. Seeing a four inch plastic Storm Trooper attached to colorful cardboard takes me back to 1977 when I struggled to gain the respect of all the other third grade boys I knew. Back then, you had to own at least three of the barely-possible figures to be “in”. It was these laser-toting plastic dudes that caused my first real parent/child conflict. For reasons I can appreciate now, but didn’t understand at the time, my father was not thrilled about me owning ANY Star Wars figures.

Star Wars came out of a time when secular humanism was coming into vogue – the Jim Jones mass suicide rocked the US and attached some serious baggage to the word “church”. My father, without ever seeing the movie, was concerned with the concept of “The Force” and the mystical battle between Luke and the “dark side”. Those ideas didn’t jive with the concept of a Holy loving God who wins all the time. I hadn’t seen the movie either, but I wanted the figures for non-stop, pretend laser battles with my friends.

Eventually, Dad came around and took Mom and me to see Star Wars at a drive-in (the space scene blending with the night sky was so cool!) Sometimes it is difficult for parents to take the time to correctly evaluate and express boundaries for their children. And it is always tough for children to comprehend the reasons why mom and dad say “no”.

Give Me Some Control

What you students say: “I can’t avoid secular music.”

What they mean: “It is a huge part of my culture and I run into it everywhere I go.”

As you talk to parents you may need to help them understand how big a part music plays in youth culture. Most parents need to make an effort to become familiar with the music their kids are listening to. When you talk with these parents about music, you should start with an examination of the lyrics and messages of the songs. “You are not allowed to listen to secular music” may be the mandate from some parents. As cliché as it sounds, music is the soundtrack for student’s lives. They’re exposed to it everywhere they go. It can be very difficult for a student to give up an entire CD collection at once. They may even be additional issues caused by a sweeping forbidding statement, giving the student motivation to blindly rebel for the sake of rebellion.

It is too easy for a parent to read about the shocking antics of some group or artist and assume that it’s true of all music. Consequently, they may translate those assumptions to their child’s entire CD collection. Parents need to un-

Understand the nature of how and why certain artists are in the limelight. Today's music reflects everything from social and spiritual questions to boy/girl relationships to bizarre and destructive rebellion. It's amazing how often a record company's front office marketing can dictate an artist's messages and attitudes. (Record companies spend thousands of dollars to cultivate image - including attitudes.) You may want to show parents that the music industry is trying to give teenagers what 'they' think teenagers want, and we know that teenagers can be pretty fickle!

One potential un-realistic expectation parents may have is that students will stop listening to "that" style of music. Few students will throw away a hip-hop CD and rush out to buy Pat Boone. It may be worth it to talk to parents about music as an art form. Point out that kids usually listen to something because they like the way it sounds, not because they really dig the philosophy the artist is spewing. Kids listen FOR the beat and end up listening TO the message.

Give Me Some Credit

What you students say: "Let me choose what I listen to."

What they mean: "Give me a chance to decide what I should and shouldn't listen to."

The heart of the issue is discernment. A big part of discernment is gently helping a student identify how spiritually mature they are. A baby Christian can be easily fooled about what is right and wrong. They might assume they are able to discern when they aren't yet ready. A growing Christian may have the skills and judgment to discern but without proper encouragement and support can lose sight of right and wrong and instead get waterlogged by the world. A worldly Christian could be past the baby stages, but in choosing to be continually influenced by the world, they have not grown like they should. Instead they justify their actions to themselves and to others.

In knowing and understanding what is being communicated through songs a parent can talk to their student and help them understand the dangers in the music. My dad had some very valid concerns about the message in Star Wars; we were able to talk about them and solidify my concepts of the Holy Spirit and the Sovereignty of God. It's great when a student hears a secular song and has the confidence and understanding to explain to a peer just how screwed-up the message is. We should be striving to help students understand when they should be disgusted, disturbed, or upset over a particular message in a song. The next step for a student is to make a conscious decision to not listen and to be willing to explain to their friends why. In going to the significant issues and concerns behind the messages, we stay away from the side-issues of style.

Music and other decisions involving discernment need to be fostered in safe discussion, which for some students may take place with spiritually mature friends or a youth leader, not necessarily always with the parents.

These are just some of the issues you may need to be talking about in an open and ongoing discussion with parents. This can be a very difficult issue that may never be completely resolved between parents and students. You may want to devote some serious prayer time before you present this information to parents.