

The Forgotten History of Christian Rock: Part Four

Welcome to *The Forgotten History of Christian Rock*.

This is Part Four of a five part series exploring the history of Christian Rock and Roll Music.

To read Part One of the series focusing on the pioneers of the movement in the 1960s and 1970s click [here](#).

To read Part Two where we looked at the popular rock bands of the 1980s and early 1990s click [here](#).

To read Part Three covering the visionary bands of the 1980s and early 1990s click [here](#).

To read Part Five recapping the series and introducing readers to the new music being created today, click [here](#).

To read our intro where we explain some of the reasons we wanted to do this series click [here](#).

Thank you so much for reading please feel free to comment below.

Part Four:

The Road Less Traveled by Michael Lytle

The late 90's to the early 2000's

The late 1990s and early 2000s were a pivotal time in Christian rock and roll music. While it may not have been obvious or even a conscious choice there was a battle going on for where Christian music would go in the future. On one hand, some of the more creative and critically acclaimed artists

like *Jars of Clay*, *Sixpence None the Richer*, and *Switchfoot* were also the artists that were selling the most records. This was not necessarily true in the 1980s where critical acclaim and commercial success did not always seem to go hand in hand. The rise of independent record labels like Tooth and Nail/BEC and Five Minute Walk/Sarabellum propelled forward artists like *Dimestore Prophets*, *Dryve*, *Starflyer 59*, and *Plankeye* who were blazing their own trails and not simply following what was popular in secular music. These labels also were reaching a younger audience which the big names of the 80s were starting to struggle with.

At the same time, the rise of modern pop/worship music was starting to gain momentum. If *Petra* and their 1989 album *Petra Praise: The Rock Cries Out* was the John Wycliffe of this new praise and worship music then *Delirious?* was its Martin Luther. (Under this analogy *Hillsong* would be Zwingli.) The boys from across the pond created the blueprint that is still being followed, for better or worse, to this day.

While we here at REO are certainly very much in favor of singing praises to and worshiping our creator, the focus from record labels and radio stations on "worship" music was not all positive. Lyrics that dealt with personal struggles, social issues, family dynamics, and life, in general, were quickly jettisoned in favor of songs that addressed God directly. Again, singing songs to God is not a bad thing, but we lost something along the way when other types of songs were discarded. Today we rarely, if ever, hear songs like *All Star United's* satirical *La La Land*, which took aim at the health, wealth, prosperity gospel movement. It is more difficult to find voices like Steve Hindalong of *The Choir* acknowledging the strain a cross-country move from Los Angeles to Nashville had put in his marriage in *Never More True*. We moved away from bands like *Plankeye* writing about their band breaking up and the uncertainty it created in *Goodbye*. Radio forgot artists like *The Waiting*, who drew inspiration from the opening

paragraph of Melville's *Moby-Dick* to write about the Old Testament wanderings of God's chosen people in the song *Israel*.

If you go to a Christian bookstore or listen to Christian radio today it is easy to see who won the battle. Modern worship music dominates the landscape while the more creative artists are once again going underground and using alternative methods to get their message to the public. We will continue this discussion in part five of our series.

The goal of the following playlist is to highlight some of the artists that we feel raised the bar of creativity and originality for Christian rock and roll music during the late 1990s and early 2000s. We realize that many of these artists would have cringed at being labeled a "Christian band". They would have preferred to be called a rock band that happened to be made up of people who were Christians. It may be hard to believe now, but this distinction really was a big deal to some during the time period covered in this article and playlist. While it might make for an interesting article at some point in time this is not that article. We tried to primarily highlight artists who either never got their due even at that time or who may have been popular then, but have fallen off the radar since. All songs on this playlist were released between 1994 and 2005. As always, there are other songs we would have included if they were available on Spotify. We have now put together four playlists for this series of articles. We expected the playlists that featured more recent music would be easier to put together than those featuring music from several decades ago. This was not really the case. Many great artists from the 1990s and early 2000s are not on Spotify. Some of our favorites that are missing include *Dimestore Prophets*, *The Listening*, *Reflescent Tide*, and *Room Full of Walters*.