Darren Mulligan of We Are Messengers
(Image courtesy of Proper Management)

Music is only part of the mission for We Are Messengers

BY JOSHUA MALONI
GM/MANAGING EDITOR

Darren Mulligan makes no bones about what his job entails – and it's not selling records, blowing up on social media, or even making money.

"Concerts and record sales and Gold records and all that stuff – that's all bonus territory, but it's not the bread and butter of our lives. The bread and butter of our lives is living in relationship with God and each other," the We Are Messengers frontman said in a phone interview.

Mulligan explained, "You see, true revival is not marked by the number of people attending a show. True revival is marked by repentance. True revival is marked by pursuit of holiness. True revival is marked by taking care of widows and orphans.

"And so, our concerts are an outward expression of how we love Jesus. But they're the least important part. The most important part is: Will we love those who society hates? Will we love our enemies? Will we take care of the least of these? And so, if the concerts are leading to that change in people because they're experiencing Jesus, praise God. But if people leave the same as they came in, better we didn't have a concert at all."

Now, if this all seems super serious – well, it is. But that doesn't mean a WAM concert isn't a blast. In fact, the Ireland-bred Mulligan has been particularly adept at crafting "bangers" over the course of the band's two most recent full-lengths: 2024's "Where the Joy Is," and "Halfway Home," which is set for release in September.

Of the former, Mulligan said, "It was such a fun record to make.

"I guess it was a season in my life where I had no idea what joy looked like or felt like anymore. God did something really special in my life. I really found a sense of peace and hope and contentment and satisfaction in him that I had never had. And so, that record was just the overflow of a life that was genuinely changed. I think the audience really resonated with that.

"We know, as a band, that if we're having a good time on stage, the audience will have a good time. The audience also knows when you're pretending. They know when you're grinding it out. But as a band and as a team, we have nothing to pretend about. We have everything we need in Jesus."

And speaking of the latter, Mulligan noted, "We do not write albums that we think people will like. We write albums we love. We write songs that we love. And we perform in a way that is particularly rowdy and raw and unpolished. We're not cool, but the songs are really contemporary, and sometimes we're ahead of the curve. Sometimes we're pushing things within the format and in the genre, and that carries its own risk from a career perspective. But what we see at the show is people going, 'I didn't know that music could feel like this, that is telling me about Jesus.' "

"I get excited about new music – I always have," Mulligan said. "I suppose this really is the middle. You know, we're 12 years in with this band, and I decided I didn't want to write another record in Nashville. Not in this season. I didn't want to compromise by doing the same thing that we've done in the same rooms and the same studios.

"So, we went and wrote this record on a riverboat in London, in Sweden, in Scotland, in Ireland, in the fifth floor of a building in New York City, and we just chased down a sound that felt new, and we chased down words that felt honest and raw. And so, it's a really honest, raw record. It's not a punk record in how it sounds, but it's a punk record in what it says.

"What's truly revolutionary is not what people think it is. What is truly revolutionary is following Jesus. That's punk rock. There is nothing more punk rock than surrendering your life to the king and taking up your cross and loving the people he asks you to love. This record is about that.

"What's it like to be a man who's in his 40s? He's not old, but he's not young; he's in the middle. What's it like to be a man who's wrestled with shame and guilt? What's it like to be a man who's halfway home? What's the rest of this journey going to look like?

"So, the record's about looking at what was before, looking at what is, and looking at what is to come – and in all of it, hoping that Christ remains (first) through all of it."

WAM will return to Darien Lake next Wednesday, to perform at Kingdom Bound.

Mulligan shared, "I just love the entire area. I love the people. They're about as Irish as you can get across the Atlantic. They're going to tell you what's on their minds. They're not going to pretend. They're rowdy. They're really engaged. And so, when we bring, like, even our Celtic Christmas record, you know, the show sold out in a couple of days, and it was packed and it was beautiful.

"And then Kingdom Bound – we've played this festival more than any other festival anywhere in the world. I tell them every year we're going to skip a year, and then they keep inviting us back!

"It's one of those festivals that I find it very hard to say no to because it's incredibly run. They've got a real heart for the gospel, and honestly, they've been there for us since long before anybody knew about We Are Messengers or cared about what we do. I want to honor Kingdom Bound and the organizers and the people that have shown up for us year after year. So, we're coming back one more time!

"I'm really excited for it – it's one of the highlights of the summer for us, is playing at Kingdom Bound."

•*Read the full Q&A with Darren Mulligan online at www.wnypapers.com.*

KINGDOM BOUND

Kingdom Bound returns to Darien Lake from July 27-29. For more information, or for tickets, visit www.kingdombound.org/.

Logo courtesy of Kingdom Bound

Passion's young audiences bringing enthusiasm back home

BY JOSHUA MALONI
GM/Managing Editor

Passion isn't just the name of a popular Christian band, or its signature conference, it's the emotion, desire and enthusiasm displayed by tens of thousands of fans following an encounter with group leaders Kristian Stanfill, Brett Younker and Melodie Malone.

What began 30 years ago with speakers Louie and Shelley Giglio has turned into a movement that includes music, teaching and a conference that drew more than 45,000 youth to Globe Life Field in Arlington, Texas, earlier this year.

And while it's easy to motivate teens and 20-somethings to action in the midst of a musical rally, Passion Music is seeing those same students sustain that zeal beyond these events and into their hometowns.

"The Lord is doing a great work on the earth right now, and there's a great awakening happening," Stanfill said in a phone interview. "There's a stirring. There's a return back to Jesus, back to the God of gods, and this generation is leading the way. There's a hunger and a desire to not only gather – like, be in gatherings like Passion – but know God's word, worship him in spirit and truth, tell the world about their faith.

"I think a lot of it comes down to, this generation of college students, they want something that's durable; they want something that lasts; something that's real, that's not going to let them down. They've been let down a lot – as have you, as have I. Been let down a lot by empty promises the world makes us; empty promises that culture makes us, and makes to us. I think this generation is, quite frankly, fed up with it, and they want something that they can build their life on – and Jesus is it.

"And so, when you see 45,000 college students coming to Globe Life Field in Texas – and they're not just coming, like, showing up; they're not just walking through the door just to check a box and go, 'OK, I'm here.' They are all in. *They are all in.*

"I wish I could take everybody to Passion and show you the way these students show up with their Bibles: They show up early; they show up prayerful; they worship with all their heart; they give money to translate scripture for unreached people groups of the world. And then they go back to their campuses with this fire burning inside of them, and it's really, really beautiful. It's not hype-y, it's not like overly emotional, it's real – and you have to give credit to what the Lord's doing right now."

Stanfill added, "We've been to college campuses, and we've seen the fruit of students inviting their friends to these worship nights, and that you have thousands of college students gathering for a worship night. All that is, is students inviting students – it's not like some big marketing plan. It's not like we have some grand, like, 'Alright, we're going to roll out this campaign to get all these students to this place.' It's like, no, 'We're coming; there's going to be preaching; there's going to be worship; and we're going to baptize some people. Who wants to come? Tell your friends.' And 5,000 students show up. That's just the nature of what's going on on college campuses right now. It's a really beautiful thing to see."

Passion Music will bring its ministry – and new music from March album release "Just That Good" – to Darien Lake on Monday as part of the annual Kingdom Bound Christian music festival.

Clockwise: Passion Music • Passion, "Just That Good" • Kristian Stanfill
(Images courtesy of Merge Public Relations)

"Just That Good," the song, "is just a response, a reaction, to what we're experiencing with Jesus in our own lives," Stanfill said.

"I've experienced a lot of freedom and redemption. I've experienced the abundant life that Jesus has to offer; and it's, quite frankly, the greatest thing I've ever experienced in my life, and this song is just an expression of that.

"And that's what these songs are on this album. It's just an expression of the goodness of God to us, his grace, his love, his mercy toward us in our life. These songs are just expressing our gratitude for that. But these songs, they're also expressing the character of God: Who is he; singing about his holiness, his glory, his majesty, his beauty, in all these different ways.

"I think this, these songs – this record – is just a natural expression of what we're experiencing in our own lives. The through line – the thread of it all – is the joy of the Lord. I think you hear that in this record. In this album and this collection of songs, there's this theme of the joy of the Lord – and that is what I believe is really marking this generation and this time we're living in. People want to sing; people want to dance; people want to express this life that we have in Christ. So, that's what I think you hear on 'Just That Good.' "

Stanfill said, "We hope to take a little bit of that spirit of Passion – what you and I are talking about right now – we want to take that and do that at Kingdom Bound.

"Everywhere that we go, any chance that we have to lead, we believe that anything is possible – and I'm really not just saying that. If we're going to go lead at Kingdom Bound, or some conference, or Passion conference, or church on Sunday – wherever it is – we have to believe that God is going to move if we have faith. So, that's what we're coming to Kingdom Bound with – that kind of faith, that kind of belief."

He added, "We're really excited to be back with you guys. We had a really special time last time we were with you, and we look forward to being back."

•*Read the full Q&A with Kristian Stanfill online at www.wnypapers.com.*

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