

# Is Catholic Music making the grade?



It has been over one year since World Youth Day. Since music was such a big part of the event, I think it would be appropriate to give my assessment of the current state of contemporary Catholic music since this historic event.

These have been troubling times for Catholic musicians. Many groups have fallen by the wayside and the number of distributors has actually shrunk. Apostlemusic.com was the biggest victim, leaving only Catholicmusicnetwork.com, Troubadour for the Lord and Heartbeat Records as the only major players in the market. I have also been troubled by the poor production quality of some recent releases. This was one aspect that I had hoped would change with the greater exposure from World Youth Day. Unfortunately, most new releases I have been receiving simply cannot compete with similar material in the secular or Contemporary Christian scene. Although some of this is due to continued disinterest from the Catholic laity, some of it is due in part to naivety on the part of some artists who feel that they simply cannot spend the extra amount of money to work with professionals. This culture of nonprofessionalism is even more troubling when I peruse last year's nominees for the United Catholic Music and Video Association Awards. There are some talented people on the slate but when praise and worship artist Susan HooKong Taylor gets nominated for Modern Rock Song of the Year (in fact, that entire category is a mess!) and some lesser known artists are nominated in multiple contradictory categories, it just reflects badly on the whole industry. Can you imagine the Grammy Awards having Celine Dion being nominated for best Al-

ternative Song? Obviously, that would cast a shadow over the entire organization. Yet, time and time again, the membership of the UCMVA, which includes many artists, show a lack of knowledge of their own industry.

Given the present state of Catholic music, is there hope for the future? Catholic artist Janelle has been making huge inroads in the Evangelical circles and her CD is one of the few that has a professional feel to it. I suspect, however, most of her sales are not to a Catholic audience. There

are also new exciting groups appearing on the horizon. One such group is Devine, which spun off from Critical Mass with an excellent CD called *Not Ordinary*. Plain Jane, which includes some Catholic members, is also starting to make waves.

Another benefit, which can be directly attributed to World Youth Day, is the networking that has taken place between the artists. I now am familiar with many new faces that I was not aware of prior to the event, and such artist interaction can only help the industry as a whole. I would encourage artists to actively seek out other artists to receive support but also to get feedback on their material.

Although there are encouraging signs, much can still be done to improve the chances of Catholic music surviving. The laity somehow has to change its attitude towards supporting Catholic artists. Because of the lack of distribution, it does mean making a stronger effort to find the artists. [www.Catholicmusicnetwork.com](http://www.Catholicmusicnetwork.com) is probably one of the best ways to do this. Artists, on the other hand, have to be more pro-active about educating themselves and by bringing the level of their art to the next level. There are resources out there to help the artists.

Overall, it's a long struggle ahead. The window of opportunity is there, but it is rapidly closing as the near term benefits of World Youth Day are fading into the past. †



Top photo: Jesse Manibusan. Bottom photo, top left: Sarah Hart, Daughters of God; top right: Darleen Alverado, Wbo Do You Say I Am; bottom right: Janet Sullivan Whitaker; bottom left: Wendy Andino, both of Daughters of God. Photos courtesy of OCP.

