



Mike Beloud (left) and Gary Gersin, proprietors of Spirit Wing Records, launched two new projects: *Catholic Music 2008* and *Catholic Christmas*.

In my senior year at Purdue University I was assigned a book to read for an upper level management course. The text examined the phenomenon of how small ideas and ordinary people have been responsible for initiating dramatic social, political and economic changes both domestically and internationally. The text investigated the moment at which an idea breaks away from ordinary, becomes extraordinary and takes on a life of its own. This moment, as coined by the book's title, is known as the "tipping point."

Meet Mike Beloud and Gary Gersin, two ordinary Catholic music enthusiasts who, a little over a year ago, took their desire to promote Catholic music and set it into motion with a compilation of 34 Catholic musicians in a double disc

album entitled *Catholic Music 2007*. The motion stirred by *Catholic Music 2007* gained momentum and the now formed Spirit Wing Records, has begun to... tip.

Beloud interviewed with *GrapeVine* from his base in California over e-mail.

At their outset Beloud and Gersin had no plans to be an actual business; they wanted only to promote Catholic music in their spare time. The plan for the compilation they would put together was simple: take any proceeds from the sale of the album and invest those funds back into promotion for the album.

Their promotion for the project started mustard-seed small: "We compared notes from all the contacts we have made

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near-proximity to one another, committing to supporting one another in the Christian walk. Oftentimes, a music ministry is birthed from this, and new songs result.

“The Sword of the Spirit” is a larger network for covenant community life, and *In Spirit and Truth*, its latest effort, stems forth from the songwriters of these communities. It is not only a congregational-tested and accessible recording, it’s a wonderful example of what individual churches and ministries can do today in order to get their songs out.

Here, individual songwriters from separate parts of the country, wrote songs that were meant to be sung, but held back from completing an album until it had enough quality songs. It is in this environment that the songwriters (Ed Conlin, John Hughes, Melody Wilson, among others) tested these songs in their communities, making tweaks whenever necessary, to be assured that the final product would be the best it could be in regards to lyrics, melody, and congregational-friendliness.

Standout tracks include “While We Still Breathe” by Daniel Knaggs, a very touching meditation based on Psalm 103. Likewise, “Return O My Soul” by Tony O’Neill brings Psalm 116 to life. “By Your Steadfast Love” by Frank Docherty breaks into a spontaneous “Alleluia” round that serves as a background to the original verse. Lastly, “The House of God” (Conlin), is a great combination of a hook-y melody married to lyrics that challenge and motivate—it’s hard to not sing along.

“We Enter In” has some of the most vivid Revelation imagery put to paper: (“You are worthy, Lord” we cry / Face to face and eye to eye / “Hallelujah, Yours the power, Yours salvation, O Most High.” And so we adore You).

The vocals, shared by a varied group of singers (including Oki Varona, Sonya Devoir, among others), are simply done. This project was not meant to show off one’s vocal gymnastics, but to introduce exceptional songs to the church.

In Spirit and Truth, as well as information on community living, is available at wordoflifecommunity.org. Lead sheets and lyrics are available there for free download. Any music minister on the search for new, powerful, congregational-friendly worship songs ought to have a listen. †

Nick Alexander

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Grape Vine

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over the years in our own music ministries and began with the established relationships.” From there the project grew: “There was a ripple effect all around the country as well as (in) parts of Canada, because the artists were all promoting the compilation in their own regions as well.”

From those humble beginnings their seed has grown and the response they have received has been overwhelmingly positive



Mike Beloud shows off Spirit Wing’s collection of CDs.

to say the least. *Catholic Music 2007* spent 12 weeks topping the Catholic Music Network charts and remained on those charts for over eight months. To add to that success, the Spirit Wing Records 2007 release won the Catholic music Unity Award in the Special Events category this year.

“It just seemed like the whole thing was Divinely guided from the start; the artists have been great to work with, and customers, bookstores and web sites (including Amazon.com and Target.com) were all very positive about the whole concept,” says Mike.

The artists featured on *Catholic Music 2007* have been able to enjoy the success of the compilation as much as Beloud and

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Gersin have. "Most of the artists were just as surprised as we were with the attention the CD received. The main things we tried to emphasize were for artists not to expect any miracles, but to consider their involvement as a very inexpensive form of advertising for their ministries." For many of the artists, the advertisement worked. "Several artists have received radio airplay on a variety of stations and shows as a direct result of being involved with the compilation."

Beloud explained that the project was designed to do more than promote. "At the beginning of the project the artists were encouraged to view the project as an opportunity to make new friends and support each others' efforts and to view it as an opportunity to draw attention to Catholic music as a whole and not just to individuals," he notes. The artists took that to heart. Beloud adds, "One of the neatest things is that the group of artists has been very active on a private forum we set up to exchange information; everything from general prayer requests, to sharing ideas/opportunities and everything else in between."

As the success of *Catholic Music 2007* grew, the questions came pouring into Spirit Wing. When would the next compilation come out? Who would be on it? Not to mention inquiries from artists who wanted to get involved with future Spirit Wing Records projects. The answers came with the October 1 release of Spirit Wing's follow-up compilation, *Catholic Music 2008*. The 2008 compilation follows the same format as the 2007 compilation: 34 tracks from the same number of artists. The album is split over two CDs, one of "Praise" – upbeat and higher energy music, the other disc, "Worship" is a mellow sounding collection of prayerful songs.

The 2008 compilation was not the only thing Spirit Wing released in October; they also released a single disc *Catholic Christmas* compilation. Said Beloud, "(We) decided that a Christmas CD would be really cool in addition to a *Catholic Music 2008* compilation." So, they set out on the daunting task of putting together a compilation of Christmas songs recorded by Catholic artists while still working on the 2008 compilation. "We have to admit, over the past 6 months of putting these latest two compilations together, there were times when we felt as though we had bitten off way more than we could chew," says Beloud. "But through a lot of prayer and hard work, we were able to organize it all and we're extremely pleased with the outcome of both new compilations."

A year after releasing their first compilation and initially relying on their small group of friends for promotion, Gersin and Beloud's mustard seed of support has grown, quickly, into a full bush of friends and supporters. "We now have a great foundation built from the last project so we plan to stick with what has worked in addition to jumping on new opportunities as they present themselves," says Beloud.

It's a safe bet to say those new opportunities will continue to present themselves but for the time being Gersin and Beloud are going to relax for a moment after the most recent releases. "For right now, we plan to enjoy the new projects and do our best to bring attention to the involved artists in any way we can," said Beloud. That attention may come in the form of a Spirit Wing concert series; "We'd like to do some regional concerts with the Spirit Wing artists."

If the current amount of growth, support and enthusiasm are any indication of the success Spirit Wing records will have in the future, the Catholic music community can look forward to enjoying their ministry for a long time to come.

Earlier, I spoke of a management course that would be inclined to describe the growth of Spirit Wing Records as an example of a "tipping point" organization. Others however, would be inclined to describe Spirit Wing Records' success as evidence that God smiles down upon those that put their faith into action.

If you'd like to get involved with Spirit Wing Records, obtain information about Spirit Wing artists or acquire any of the Catholic Music or Catholic Christmas compilation albums, visit spiritwing-records.com or inquire at your local book/music store. †



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