

Country Gospel Connection

Songwriting Article for November 2011

By Clayton B Howell

Ok, I admit it. I have been dreading this one too. I am minus the best friend and co-writer you could ever have and it is like half of me is no longer functioning correctly. Bear with me and I'll get through it. Most of you know by now that Keith Caldwell, my co-writer, went to be with Jesus on November 19, 2011 at 5:30 PM. When he left, he took the best part of the team with him and now I have to figure this out between me and God, so cut me some slack. I will tell you that the last discussion about a project that we had was that I was going to finally put out a "Hymn Album". Many of you know that though they sell in concert, DJ's rarely want them for much of anything and so we were desperately trying to figure out how to make this work.

We finally came to two conclusions and I will share them with you for whatever value you may glean from them. First of all, we knew that it would be a mixture of instrumental and vocal arrangements. Secondly, we knew that there would be at least one or more original hymns on this project. After that, it was anybody's guess.

Let's address the first point. Since I sing and play, we knew that it would have to be a mixture of the two and that the arrangements would be different from most albums in that they would not really feature me so much as the arrangements; that way there would be a greater leeway in what we wanted on the album and allow for wide stylistic differences between songs. Some of the hymns would retain most of their recognizable melody with perhaps a tempo change or maybe a change of time signature all together, while others would have more drastic changes. For example, Rock of Ages will retain the original melody pretty much, but will be in 4/4 instead of 3/4. It will have a definite country feel to it. There will be a medley of "The Church's One Foundation and the Doxology" in a very stylized orchestral arrangement. There will also be an arrangement of "Pass Me Not O Gentle Savior" that will have a blues feel to it. The melody will be altered for the purpose.

Point two, an original hymn; not often done in our time, this will be a challenge to follow a strict meter and rhythm. Good challenge, but not easy. I had already started on one awhile back, so it was a natural fit. It has a verse in strict meter and then the chorus goes into a medium tempo praise style song. All in all it will have a wide variety and hopefully, something for everyone.

By using these two strategies, hopefully I will be able to put out a CD that blesses people with some familiar hymns and then provides them with fresh approaches to other ones. Who knows, there might even be a DJ or two willing to play them on their program. This could turn out to be a project that stands with its feet firmly planted in both worlds; the concert stage and the radio venue might actually complement each other with this strategy in place.

I will leave you to think about this yourself and come to whatever conclusions you may. All I know is, this was certainly a lot easier effort wise and easier to get excited about when I had the "other half of my talent", still with me. Please keep this project in mind and give me a holler if you get the chance and let me know about any projects you may have coming up that we could discuss in this forum. Two heads can be better than one. Ask me, 'cause I know. Until next time, keep on writing.