

LESSIE DOES



An Australian Christian Band Story

MATT BAKER



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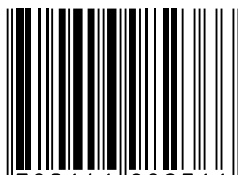
Matt Baker from Lessie Does shares an interesting Australian Christian band story. In 1995 the Australian Christian band scene began to grow both in the world and within the Christian community. One venue in Adelaide, South Australia called the Underground, literally grew a hundred Christian bands. The Christian music scene in Australia then progressed to achieve many state number one records. This exciting chapter of music produced the largest independent Christian band scene in the history of Australia.

This Australian Christian music scene then continued to grow and become national. These bands achieved national recognition. They played at festivals, received radio play and they also toured nationally. This is an exciting book written and expressed with a band documentary writing style. The book was made and developed from real band documentary interviews.

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by MATT BAKER

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ADELAIDE ■ AUSTRALIA

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*All poetry and lyrics in the documentary book come from the Australian
Christian band scene only*

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This book is dedicated to

Dear God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit,
Praise God for His glory and power.
Praise God. Amen.

MY BEAUTIFUL MOTHER JENNIFER

Thank you for all of your editing and love on this project. Thanks for your support and encouragement along the way. May God continue to guide you. I pray that Jesus will work through you and pour out His Spirit upon you. May people come to know and love Jesus through your example and witness to Christ.

TO MY GRANDMA AND GRANDPA

Words can never express the depth of love that you have shown to me.
Your kindness is something that uplifts me and gives me peace.
Praise Jesus for His work in you.

TO MY AWESOME FAMILY

Thank you for your continued help in my life. May Jesus bless you all.
May you grow in Him each day. I pray that you may walk in the path of the Lord.

TO THE FROST FAMILY

Thank you for your ongoing prayers and encouragement. I know Jesus is with you,
His Spirit continually is at work in your lives. You are of great blessing to me.
I pray that Jesus may continue to shine through you.

TO DAD

Thank you for your continued love over all these years. God bless you.
I look forward to hearing about all of your adventures.
I hope you enjoy this one.

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I pray that God will guide you and help you to continue His work.

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Horizon members and their families.
Your support to Lessie Does has been greatly valued and cherished.

Thank you Jeremy Owen and Andrew Lang for all of your input into my life.
Praise God for what He did do through Lessie Does.
May you continue to bear witness to Jesus in your life each day.

To everyone involved in the Underground music scene,
bands, fans, management and support crew:
thank you for your efforts and motivating words.
Your example to me has taught me a lot about Jesus.
I see Him in you. I pray that Christ will continue to be
with everyone and that the Holy Spirit will lift you up and guide you always.

Thanks to all of the bands that have supported
the Underground and Lessie Does.

A SPECIAL THANKS TO:

HONE

embodiment
12:14

THINKTANK str

SERAPHS COAL

edison hummel

hometime wone

LESSIE DOES

God So Loved the World

the
frugals

waybackwhen

Underground Management

and all the bands who played at the

**UNDERGROUND &
HAROLD FESTIVALS**



YOU'RE A BIG PART OF GOD'S STORY!

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*In the pursuit of truth
I found a road
Worth walking down
The road that led me to you
In the pursuit of life
I took your hand
Reached out to mine
Please God never let me go.*

Aaron Mabikafola, *Long for You*

HOMETIME

CHAPTER 1

A Dream of Heaven

.....

*Well I know a place of harmony,
where no one will act so selfishly
and I can take you to this place
if you just ask me.*

Andrew Lang, *Place of Harmony*
LESSIE DOES

When you leave this cruel world, you won't take anything;
with a snap of the fingers life will have new meaning;
when you leave this cruel world what will you hope to find?

Leaving the World Behind; Lessie Does

I HOPE TO FIND HEAVEN. I dream of a place of harmony! I dream of a place where people will not act so selfishly. In many ways earth is a magnificent home. God's creation is beautiful and yet at the same time it's a difficult world for many people. So many of us live in a cruel reality!

When you leave this world what will you hope to find?

What are you searching for?

As a child I was given a dream of eternity from God and then later in

life my band Lessie Does sang about it, we sang about a place of harmony, yet we also sang about what this world is really like. This topic of eternal life with God was simply one message that would be expressed by Lessie. God has communicated the importance of eternity to me again and again. He is helping me to focus on heaven!

Lessie Does was simply one group associated with the Underground band community in the land of Oz. This was a very important Christian venue in Adelaide, South Australia. It helped to generate approximately a hundred bands. These bands would share Jesus to the world through a cultural music message. The Holy Spirit spoke through artists and musicians. These groups then flooded into the Australian music world.

For the record, it is important to note that the Underground venue was inspirational as a Christian music hub for the Adelaide scene and for Australia – although some of the bands around at the time would never consider themselves attached to the Underground in a big way, nor would they label themselves a part of a movement associated with the site. However I have chosen to use ‘the Underground,’ as a term in order to tell the story of one particular assembly of Adelaide bands for these groups all played and started out at the venue. I also wish to share with you Australia’s exciting world of original Christian band music.

I believe this is an important chapter in Australian Christian music. I think the Underground bands share a symbolic message from Jesus to the world and to the church. For Yahweh was at work in each record. Essentially we share the same faith as every Christian; however this faith was delivered through art and song. Jesus has died for us so that we may be saved and now He calls us to share what He has done in us and through us. This music adventure is my experience of God on earth.

Like many people, I have been on a massive journey. Despite a strong childhood faith in Jesus I became lost in my early adult years. I was a Christian artist in a band but I personally could not express Christ or tell my faith to the world through art. I relied strongly on my Christian friends to do this for me. It actually took mental health problems and a large spiritual battle to bring me back to a point where I could communicate my faith to everyone around me.

I am not able to play in a performing band anymore due to health issues. However I can now clearly express my love for Jesus in words. This story has

been of great encouragement to me through this dark spiritual time. I have fought to tell you this narrative because I believe the bands have something important to say. I hope, also, you may be encouraged and uplifted as you walk with Jesus and as you hear the story of the Underground bands.

I WAS BORN ON FEBRUARY 14, 1978 – Valentine’s Day! My Christian mother Jennifer Baker had prayed for a son earnestly. She had a miscarriage before having her first baby girl, so pregnancy was always a time of prayer for Mum. Prayer is one thing my mother is very good at. This woman can pray and pray and pray. God answered her prayers. He told her that He would give her the desires of her heart! We always joke in the family that she has a direct communication line with God for she seems to receive many amazing answers to prayer.

God laid it on her heart that she was going to have a son. I came three weeks early. I must have been keen to get into this world. There I was early as usual. I weighed eight pounds and half an ounce. My mother Jenny named me Matthew, meaning a gift from God, as He had answered her desperate prayers for a son. God had placed the name Matthew on her heart. On Valentine’s Day, a day of love, my mother now had a new son born, and a beautiful daughter as well.

My truly, always wiser and older sister Julie, was waiting for me. She was almost two years of age when I was born. She played the big sister role well. Julie loved to play games with me as a young child. We would together turn the house upside down in our adventures. It was not uncommon for us to make a cubby house out of the furniture. Julie and I played very naturally; she would love to teach and guide me.

Music was something that I would have to learn though. I was not born into a traditionally brilliant music family, although my father Rodger particularly loved ’60s rock music. He would listen to the car radio regularly with me. From time to time Dad popped on a few vinyl records, not all that often though, but enough for me to experience it as a child. The upbeat music and nice melody lines made me feel happy.

Dad had a passion for good harmonies and pop music. Elvis was one of his favourites. He wasn’t like an Elvis impersonator or anything like that, but Rodger’s passion for the singer came out a bit in his style and appearance. Dad used to wear his dark brown hair neatly slicked back in

a beautiful wave, a little bit like Elvis himself. I know these '60s bands have had a big influence on my musical tastes. Childhood music seems to shape our future interests and style more than we give it credit for. It is very important in our growth and development. My Dad helped to shape much of my childhood musical influences.

These early experiences of music with Dad helped me to progress as a musician. I was a Christian artist in the making, not that I knew it or had any realisation of this yet. Listening to records and radio must have helped me progress instrumentally speaking, but still, I always struggled with singing. Despite never being a brilliant vocalist, I grew up as a musician. Rock and roll would later become very prominent in my early adult life and I was definitely not the only Christian kid on this path.

The Holy Spirit was already at work organising, drumming up and growing young Christian rockers during the '80s. This was to be a relatively new concept for the church in Australia. There were lots of worship groups around but original band music was in no way fully developed yet in our country.

Christian band culture all started to unfold in a big way during the '90s. These days there is more Christian music in the world than ever before and we can access new tunes every day. We are only limited by time and money. It's not like Christian rock music was born in the '90s but it sure did start to grow and become increasingly prominent.

This relatively new form of Christian music would allow artists to write about their lives and the lives of others. Poets could look beyond their own journey and write about God. Subsequently, much of the artist's music would draw attention to what was happening in the world. I believe it drew a picture of God on planet earth.

The Holy Spirit certainly had a growing voice through these up and coming Christian rock musicians. Believers now had to wake up and listen to what the Spirit had to say through us! It's not like God's people didn't have a few things to teach this generation of artists either. God was growing up musicians and preparing us to sing not only to the church but to the world.

In some ways pop music can be considered rebellious towards God. The lyrics often reflect our sinful nature as humans. However I pray that God can use what the Underground bands did do through Christ Jesus. He was able to outreach to the world and share a message of salvation

through music. Despite our sinful ways, Jesus was present and in us. He was able to work through the artists. I have tried to use the best lyrics from these bands; however there are still human imperfections in our words. I encourage you to hear Jesus through the lyrics and through what we have to say. I also encourage you to test out what you do learn, test it out with Jesus, the Holy Spirit and with God's word; in this way you will be led to the light and to the truth. Please listen to what Jesus has to say to you through this book, and disregard my human nature, or at least learn from it. This journey with Christ has led me to worship God.

Is there anything more beautiful than thousands of angels singing in heaven, day and night, 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God almighty'? Can you feel how big worship is? Can you see angels in heaven worshipping God, it's massive! It's an amazing revelation to picture the full magnitude of worship. You're not alone, or as isolated as you think when you worship God! Even when you're an infant musician God has heaven joining in with you.

As a young child I first learned the Bible before I learnt to play any kind of musical instrument. My Mum promised God to love and train me in His ways and for His service. "Bedtime, it's stories with family, later learned and believed." [*Breath Into; Antiskeptic*] I would learn and believe the stories from the Bible through bedtime readings. I strongly responded to these stories read to me by my loving mother. It's no wonder I can remember them still, because she shared them with me from the cradle.

I learnt to praise God even as a child. We would never miss church on Sundays; my family was not super traditional or overly religious; this is just how it was. Communicating to God through song was a very natural part of my being. I prayed that my faith would grow to be strong like a mustard seed. Church life taught me how to praise God and it helped to develop my faith.

As a child, I had a solid and healthy relationship with God. At four and three quarter years of age, I asked Jesus to come into my heart and He became a real and close friend and Saviour to me. It was a beautiful prayer; I had responded to Jesus as my Lord and Saviour. I now had a personal Christian faith of my own. This independence helped me to grow into a very confident child. I felt extremely close to God during this period and I often look back at this time for inspiration. I think sometimes a childhood

faith is exactly what God is calling me to have.

I had genuinely accepted and responded to Jesus during this time and He communicated very strongly that He was present in my life. My Mum actually noticed my behaviour changing as a result of following Jesus closely. This was the start of my own personal relationship with Jesus.

Another communication from God to my mother through prayer was a promise that all her children would serve the Lord. I think my Mum was pretty keen to help out on this one! My mother wrote down my childhood faith journey in a book, and I illustrated it. This has helped me to remember my childhood and the spiritual events that have taken place in my life. A love for music and the Bible was growing inside of me as a kid. I loved rock music, and worship was simply a part of who I was as a person, it was a part of my identity and still is!

At age five and six my favourite storybook from the Bible was Daniel. I desired to grow and be like him. In my first real prayer, I prayed that Jesus would make me like Daniel. He was a man devoted to God. He shared a public faith even when at times this meant risking his own life. Through this devotion of faith God worked in Daniel. He gave him gifts of interpretation, which helped him to bear witness to God's power.

Daniel could explain dreams and writings; God also communicated and spoke to him and through him. Yahweh protected Daniel even when he was thrown into the lion's den. Our God rescues and saves people and He performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on earth. [Daniel 6:27] Daniel was my favourite story in the Bible for many reasons. I believe this desire to be like Daniel gave me extra spiritual strength as a child.

I had a dream of heaven at the age of six. I saw its beauty. I illustrated the vision in my childhood faith book. In the drawing I am connected to Jesus and we walked through the fields as the angel called us up to heaven. The angel was flying inside a beautiful rainbow. The sky was filled with a lot of energy. There was a thunderstorm and it was pouring with rain even though the sun was still out. It was a sun shower, projecting a huge rainbow. Through this dream I now had heaven in my sights. I had a picture of heaven, however I did not fully comprehend the value of seeing it as a child, nor could I have at this point. This dream of heaven was simply a part of me, and my relationship with God.

Many people have dreams of eternal life. Heaven, angels and dreams are

in fact huge topics in the Bible. I later discovered as an adult, an interesting vision in the book of Revelation. In Chapter 10, Verse 1, John writes that he saw a mighty angel coming down from heaven with a rainbow above his head. I think it's a place where I would like to sit if I was an angel, right in the middle of a rainbow! This passage has helped to confirm my dream and further encourage me to share it with others.

I think rainbows are one of the most beautiful things in all of creation. A beautiful rainbow is a sign from Yahweh. The rainbow is one of the many signs of love that God has given to the world. He has given me a sign from heaven and an angel to help inspire me and others, as we journey on the path of life with Jesus.

As a young adult though, I lost all sight of this childhood faith. I had fallen over again and again and this led to trouble. My Bible hero Daniel was simply a subconscious part of me during this time. Even though I had misplaced my childhood faith almost completely, this adventure reveals that despite me being lost and covered in sin, God was constantly with me.

While I had left my faith book on the bookshelf for many years, God was at work in my band Lessie Does. He carried me when I was not able to fully express my faith. The Holy Spirit was able to work through my friends. God was putting the dream of heaven into action on earth through our music. He had a whole group of angels singing to me through Christian musicians. My friends and band members sang about a place of harmony; they sang about sharing life with our Lord forever and ever. It's amazing what Jesus does through the lives of people. Our God is a miracle worker. He was able to use my music as a ministry for Him even when I was doing it for myself. God is much bigger than our ways and our plans. Our God is amazing.

At age 26 I found myself dealing with the whole world of mental illness. Through these desperate struggles I rediscovered my childhood faith book again. This book means a lot more to me now and for good reason. A dream of heaven is something that you need to see when you are faced with death. When I was lost, Jesus was there!

He pulled me out of a dark world and saved me!

Now my faith book helps to remind me of how Jesus worked through me and furthermore it gives me a dream of life everlasting with God. I know this is a dream worth hanging onto this time!

“Walking the road of life, You are with me; when sin was all I had You came and forgave me; when chains imprisoned me You came and freed me; when pain was all I felt, You came and healed me.” [In my youth, **Hometime**] Jesus is a Saviour that travels and walks with us constantly. He communicated with me that He would take me through life and into heaven.

What do you think is the purpose of your journey on earth? I know that God’s primary purpose is for us is to be loved by Him and saved from our sin through Jesus. Heaven is where He actually wants us to journey to! I think too often we lose our objectives and purpose. God wants us to keep eternal life in mind as we travel with Him. Having purpose helps us to love and save others through Jesus along the way.

When everything is negative in the thunderstorm you desperately hold onto the win in your life. I can strongly visualize this picture of everlasting life with God. I know that it is but one page in the book of eternity that God has for me. I can see the angel in the rainbow singing to me. God has called me to praise Him for all eternity; He has called me to a ministry of music. I believe He has angels encouraging me, and singing to me as I walk with Jesus and journey with Him towards heaven. “Even if I could, I wouldn’t change the beauty of this faith, I have you and childhood dreams.” [Of Childhood Kings, **Thinktank**]

Having a peaceful time, without end, with our Heavenly Father is a topic that we would later sing about through Lessie Does. ‘Place of Harmony’ was no doubt our band’s biggest contribution to the Underground band scene. This song was written by Andrew Lang. The song became the theme behind our most successful EP. It became the poster that people recognised. It was our main message.

The lyrics talk of a world that has gone from a warm place to a world that is now stone cold. We should ask ourselves why is this world the way it is? What can I do to help God? The song goes on to describe a selfish murder. Andrew expresses through lyrics that this is a typical story, which we can hear on the six o’clock news. This song shares that the world is no longer a warm place; it is now stone cold for many people. Although Jesus love for us helps us through this difficult time. The Bible also shares with us that heaven has been at war against evil. [Rev 12:7]

The chorus of ‘Place of Harmony’ sings about life after death. We hope

to go to a place that is not selfish. “I know a place of harmony, where no one will act so selfishly and I can take you to this place, if you just ask me.” [Lessie Does, *Place of Harmony*] Lessie Does was engaging audiences on the topic of heaven. I like this song because it’s not a watered down message. It does not pretend that the world is OK, because it’s not. Rather it shares the need for heaven. Andrew Lang would often share the meaning behind this song with the audience. It became our most important message as a band.

I think Christians need a dream of paradise. I encourage you to think about spending eternity with Jesus when you worship, it will help you to see the bigger picture; it may help you to see all of heaven’s angels calling you on.

Place of Harmony

.....

When our world’s gone from warm to stone cold,
 Why don’t you ask what can I do?
 Lying on a bed a man’s lost in his head,
 Comes into your ward and puts a bullet in your head.
 Well I know a place of harmony,
 Where no one will act so selfishly
 And I can take you to this place if you just ask me.
 Sometimes it’s better not to let yourself find out
 what’s on the six o’clock news.
 It can burn your mind and leave a big stain
 that you won’t find; you’ll just feel the pain.
 Well I know a place of harmony,
 Where no one will act so selfishly
 And I can take you to this place if you just ask me

ARTIST *Andrew Lang* ■ BAND *Lessie Does* ■ SONG *Place of Harmony*
 RECORD *Place of Harmony EP* © 1999

CHAPTER 2

Beautiful Rainbow, Beautiful Mentor

*I can see the silver lining shining on the
darkest cloud, every rainbow knows it takes
a thunderstorm to bring it out and now I see
clearly – there's something more I've got to be.*

Dan Jones, *Hope is where the heart is*
SERAPHS COAL

IN THE ILLUSTRATION OF MY CHILDHOOD DREAM I see the silver lining shining, and the thunderstorm has produced a beautiful rainbow. I know there is something more I've got to be through Jesus. In a fallen world I have struggled to meet God's complete and full plan for my life, yet He continues to use all that I have done for His glory! I regularly need to hand my sins over to Jesus, and ask Him to forgive me and take the burden away. It helps me to know that God has given us angels to call us home. He has given us music in the heavens and on earth.

I used to jump around as a kid playing some serious air guitar on my tennis racquet; I did not even need music or any encouragement. It was one of my favourite pastimes. My parents kind of worked out that I wanted to learn the guitar. I never asked; they more saw it in me. They questioned

me for a while: “Do you want to learn to play the guitar?”

I was pretty sure that this was the instrument for me. Jumping round and having fun was my kind of thing.

As a kid you watch the band play every Sunday in church, but you never imagine that this is what you can do with your life. I had picked out my favourite instrument by this stage. It was the electric guitar that I loved! I then later had a go on the guitar owned by the Pastor’s son. I thought it was so cool to be honest. It was an amazing experience to play on an electric guitar. I was sitting down, but I was jumping around inside again. I think my parents were still testing me out at this stage, but it was clear to them after this encounter with the guitar that this was what I wanted to do.

That was the end of all discussions. My parents sent me off to guitar lessons with Mr Fred Sellers at the age of seven. He was a retired gentleman in his seventies, who had spent his whole life devoted to music. He was getting a little frail, but music was his life and he decided to keep on teaching well into his retirement years. He was a very patient and kind guitar teacher. Fred Sellers never brought in photocopied music. He used to write the notes out on paper miraculously and perfectly each music lesson.

In my first guitar lesson I confessed that I was a left-hander, but he wouldn’t have anything to do with this at all. He argued that there was no good left-handed guitarists in this world and that was not how you play the guitar properly anyway. Since then I have learnt that there are lots of good left-handed guitarists but, at the time, I took all his advice on board and we went out and bought a three-quarter nylon acoustic. It was a regular guitar made for right-handers!

I had small hands and chords were impossible for me to start out with, so I began learning with single notes. Fred Sellers taught me the most beautiful classical songs. Many of these arrangements were his personal creations. He would handcraft many songs for me.

At times he discussed music as a career.

“You could make a living from music you know. Can you sing?” he would ask.

The answer to that question came out at the 1986 church Christmas play. At age eight I was a vitally important member of the three wise men. I was asked to sing a solo verse in the play. I’m not sure why I was asked, but it was probably because my mother had a key role in the production

of the play. I was extremely nervous about walking down the aisle in front of a very packed out hall. It was a hot summer's night and I was dressed up in full wise men attire. I remember singing OK for most of it; to be honest I was happy just to remember all my lines. However, it was clear to me that this was not my natural talent. I never classed myself as lead singer material after that performance. But this wasn't the end of all my experiments with singing. I did not give up on it completely just yet.

I happily continued lessons with Fred Sellers until the start of high school. I was by no means his most brilliant student, but I progressed along OK I guess. I loved it, I just didn't like reading music that much. I was able to play single notes well on the guitar, but I had never really progressed that much up the fret board and chords were not my speciality either. I would definitely not be classed as a childhood genius on the guitar, nor would you describe me as a natural musician.

I was very much a kid at the time when the Underground band scene in South Australia was beginning to take shape. However, I had no knowledge of this venue's whereabouts at this stage of my life and I think original Christian rock music was still very much in its infancy at this point in Australia anyway.

This is how it all started out. The Underground band venue began in the early '90s. The gigs leading up the start of this venue were very much unofficial in their nature. The scene totally developed out of the culture of the church at the time. It was a very musically orientated church.

"It all started out with our friends' bands playing at parties," commented management. "The bands would set up in the kitchen of the house and away we would go. It was not uncommon to see us jumping around to the bands in the kitchen at these parties."

The initial venue after these house party sessions was first located at Gawler Place, Adelaide. These first shows were literally held in an underground basement, hence the name the Underground.

Band culture became very much the lifestyle of this house church. This church would later grow to become a music community; it was the first ever Christian city central band venue in the state. Where else could Christian bands find a safe and friendly place to start out! There was really no one else doing it at the time, no one! The residence had been born and it was now alive and kicking!

The void of Christian music in fact helped to create the premise. In the early '90s there was a strong spirit of discontentment in young emerging Christian artists. I loved punk and rock music and the way it made me feel, but I just had nothing in my CD collection that matched up with my personal beliefs. Christian alternative music was around but it was hard to source up in mainstream outlets. It was difficult to find a band that was doing a solid Christian message. I think this world reality was a major catalyst behind the Underground movement starting up.

Despite the growth of original Christian music I may have even given up on the guitar for good all together, except that I did not want to study drama at high school; the whole acting out of my comfort zone was a little bit hard for me during puberty and at this stage of my life. So that meant that music would be compulsory for me to study at least until Year 10. My parents gave me my first electric guitar in Year 8. My Dad paid off the final deposit on the guitar and practice amp with some money my Mum had put aside and he took it home to a very excited son!

This first electric guitar of mine was white in body with black trimmings. It was a basic model but I loved it! Owning this electric guitar was exactly like getting my first bike – I felt so free. I knew that it was going to take me on a journey and an adventure. At this stage I did not have to even be able to play anything, I was happy to simply hold the guitar.

Things soon progressed to early jam sessions. I was blown away with the whole sound. The initial joy of turning up the amp really loud when the family went out is something that still remains with me. I was cautious with volume levels to start with but I soon became used to the whole idea of loud rock out sessions!

I was finally back to where I had started out. I was jumping around the room again, only this time I had a real guitar and not just air or a tennis racquet in my hands! I had lost that feeling for years while I played an acoustic guitar, but now I had it back. I had energy and excitement again for music! It did not matter what I played, it was the pure energy release that I loved. There is something special about your first electric guitar. It is one of our key worship machines in the end times!

My high school guitar teacher taught me rock chords and the blues scale. He had long hair and a gentle and relaxed manner. He was a younger man. As a teacher he knew a lot about the electric guitar and music. I think he could

see that I was not that interested in classical guitar music, so he focused more on rock. Learning rock chords was a revelation to me after playing around on the acoustic guitar for years. It's a whole new ball game for a teenager to play rock chords. I began to play old classic '60s tunes and some '90s music.

I was never that excited about guitar lessons or practice. I was the worst student ever, I think. I would miss practice and guitar lessons. My heart was not fully in music at that stage, I was kind of hanging in there. Things were tough socially at school for me and I was not a balanced student at that stage. My guitar teacher tolerated my performance and simply kept helping me and encouraging me during music lessons.

He taught me the blues scale in high school. It was the main thing I walked away with in the end. I went over and over the one scale until I had it down. From there on he taught me how to improvise and play around on the scale. If you had to do a quick course in rock and roll then the blues scale and rock chords would be considered mandatory. They are such simple things to learn, but still they can take a life time to master. There is no limit to what music you can write with the blues as your base. I often love to play around with this song writing formula still today.

I started going to youth group in 1992. I was in Year 9 at the time. I was further inspired to play the guitar by key mentor and youth group leader Craig Cope. He used to play on this amazing twelve-string guitar. He would belt out worship songs passionately. Craig would often ask me to play worship songs for the youth group, but I was not quite confident enough as a musician to do this at that stage. This never stopped Craig from encouraging me and getting on my case to play in church. He was a huge support to me in those early years. I loved youth group.

Craig Cope gave me a verse on a Christian Easter Camp that year to encourage me. It was the church verse, Isaiah 40:31.

But those that hope in the Lord will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run
and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint.

This verse would later encourage my faith in the deepest and darkest time. During my struggles with mental illness this verse encouraged me a lot. The church verse became my verse. It helps me to know my spiritual home. It encourages me to journey with Jesus. Youth group helped to build my faith up. It gave me a home and Christian friends.

Through youth group I met up with Jeremy Owen. By this stage Jeremy was already a very confident drummer and musician, despite being a year younger than me. His Dad was a drummer and Jeremy had practically grown up on the kit. He had a strong background in drama and singing. Jeremy played key roles in state theatre productions as a kid. We became good friends through youth group.

There were only a small number of guys in the youth group, so we all became very close friends. We did a lot of cool stuff and growing up together. These friends are very special to me. My youth group life was actually a lot more stable than my social life at high school. Jeremy and the boys played a big part in all of this. Youth friends became the band's core support network until the end. They were Lessie Does family members basically.

The thing about Jeremy is that he is a good friend to many people. He is an amazing communicator. If you ever send him a text you can be sure to have an instant reply most times. Jeremy is a loyal friend who sticks by you even when things get difficult. Many people are blessed by his relaxed and peaceful attitude to life.

I received my first taste of punk music through a high school friend. I had no idea what it was – I simply called it *surf music*. Punk music had a huge underground swell at the time. It seems there was a whole generation of kids getting hooked on it at a similar stage. Dan Jones, the lead singer of an Underground band called Seraph's Coal, described to me in later years that he got into punk music a little bit more through some body-boarding videos. I was also getting hooked on fast punk music through some body-boarding tapes that my friend lent me in 1992.

From that time onward I was personally way into body boarding and surf punk music. This combination made for a new generation of kids with their own punk identity. Skate boarding and surfing were becoming vitally important for this generation, in the fact that it also shaped our music, clothes and lifestyle. Punk music was never main stream in those days but it was well on the rise.

Body boarding was a very popular past time at Immanuel. Our youth group was getting way into it at the same time. Jeremy and I started our surfing adventures together around this period. Punk music certainly became a part of this culture and we were in it! We were into surfing and

punk music; the two went very closely together. It was a fun time. Surfing and youth group friends helped to stabilize my life in high school. They got me through this difficult social time. I feel the two combined together and did a lot for my life.

I had a couple of close friends in high school, but I had not found anyone with whom I matched up with completely. I found it difficult to find a friend at school with similar Christian beliefs and interests. I seemed to be moving around from friendship group to friendship group quite a lot in Years 8 and 9. It was a bit of an unsettling time personally at school until I met up with Andrew Lang.

Andrew came down to Immanuel College at the start of Year 10 from the Riverland. He was previously based in the South Australian country town of Berri. His Dad, Peter Lang, relocated his business and the family moved to Adelaide. His older brothers had already studied at Immanuel through the boarding school. Andrew was still very much a country boy for a long time, even after he had been at Immanuel for quite a while. He talked slowly and he was more relaxed than most people I knew.

Andrew and I became close friends in Year 10. Our musical friendship soon grew and developed. We would talk about bands a lot. Spare moments in class were spent on the subject of music. Neither of us were highly into the theory of music – we were more focused on starting up a band.

For kids growing up in the country, rock and roll was always very important.

“It was actually a big thing in the country,” Andrew Lang said.

When I met Andrew he was already firmly entrenched in music and was more into secular rock music than I was. He knew his bands a lot more than I did, mainly because he had two older brothers who were listening to music at home, but even then I would not have called myself a huge rock follower by that stage. I was not a big record collector by Year 10.

My heart was never into formal music lessons. I decided not to continue to study music any more by the end of Year 10 and I also stopped guitar lessons. I had walked away from these lessons learning rock chords and the blues scale, which was not to be underrated.

Andrew also taught me how to read and play tablature. I preferred this style rather than reading real music notes. Despite falling away from formal training, Andrew and I were getting more and more into band culture.

We were inspired to start a High School rock band after watching the older Year 12 groups. I remember sitting on the boarder's lawn watching a Year 12 band, thinking that this music was just the coolest thing ever! I always enjoyed the shows and the antics. It was something that I aspired to do, but at the same time I never imagined that I could achieve this, or do anything like it. When you're in Year 10 in a big school you can actually feel pretty small sometimes.

Andrew and I soon started out jamming in the music room at lunch times in Year 10. He did most of the song selections. We started out playing covers just on our guitars; we had no vocals at this stage. We eventually formed a four-piece band. Our friendship group was actually very musical. About seven different bands have formed out of these friendships at Immanuel College.

To be honest I did not have any personal aspirations of taking music further after school. My parents had always encouraged a career and I had never thought of music as an option. I think Andrew was dreaming a little bit bigger though. He had much stronger aspirations of success and this continued to drive him and motivate him further. He could see the stage and the crowd. Andrew could see the show!

Lang used to have lessons at school as well. I think he was a very different guitar student from me. Andrew worked hard to progress as a guitarist. He was very competent and gifted. I had the basic rock kit, with power chords and the blues scale; but Andrew had the full show! He could play most songs well and he was also a very talented lead guitarist. His metal background inspired him to develop his solo skills. Andrew was well on the way to becoming a competent guitarist by the conclusion of Year 10.

I was on an end of year school excursion and we were down at the beach. There was a group of us swimming around the jetty. It was a warm summer's day and everyone was unwinding after the year of study. It was time to head home and we were getting called in by the teachers. I was still half way down the jetty and I was getting the hurry up. I was briskly walking almost at a run, heading back to get on the bus.

One of the students decided to jump off the jetty and swim in and I decided to follow him in a split-second decision. I hit the water and kept going all the way to the bottom. The impact was quite hard and the force went into my back. The tide had gone out and the water was not much

more than waist deep. I kept on hurrying in to catch the bus, I did not actually think about the injury that much; I had a very strong core at the time and my back was well supported but this injury continued to impact on me for the rest of my life. This accident must have caused a very small fracture in my lower back, but I was not aware of this and I never had it diagnosed. I simply carried on with life.

By Year 11, Andrew and I aspired to play in chapel services and perform at lunchtime concerts. Before doing anything though we needed to serve quite a long apprenticeship in the practice room. Before we even played in Chapel or at a concert, we needed a lot of practice together.

Communication and practice is a skill in itself. When you're a teenager it can take a lot of discipline to stop playing your guitar and communicate to one another in the practice room. At times we were very much kids mucking around on instruments rather than a band, but we were starting to make more and more progress. Things were gradually coming together for us as a group.

Chapel was a big thing at Immanuel College. The day would start out with services most mornings. It was an important part of the school's fellowship and culture. We were blessed to have several adult performers who came into chapel and played for us. Robin Man and Peter Sullivan were two of my personal favourites. I used to sit and take it all in. They were real performers. I remember they used to shock and surprise us. They both achieved a reaction, which is important. It's not until you reflect that you realise how important mentors are in your progress as a musician. At the time we took these services at Immanuel for granted.

Robin Man was a Lutheran-based songwriter and performer. He was actually a pretty big influence on a whole lot of young Christian artists growing up in the '90s. He was a prolific songwriter. Robin had put out many worship albums and song books, especially in the Lutheran community. He would come and perform new Christian songs for us about once a year.

Robin Man was a striking character. Despite being slightly '80s in appearance he had a very cool look. Robin had a large set of hair, almost Afro style, and he used to bust out his florescent pink guitar, whilst dressed in a black leather jacket. He was the type of person who you never forget once you meet him. Andrew and I would both describe Robin as an important

mentor in our journey towards Christian music. He had such a relaxed style and you could bet that he would always have a new song for you.

Robin could write and write and write music! It is something that I aspire to, still to this day. The amount of energy that he had was amazing. God was working through him even more than we knew it at the time, that's for sure. You know what school can be like; you take things for granted, rather than realising what you are witnessing. We were witnessing a Christian songwriter. He was a real gem of a person and he will always go down on my list as an important music mentor.

Another key person in my life's journey towards becoming a Christian musician was Peter Sullivan. He was my science teacher, but he was also a worship leader at my church. Like my youth group leader Craig Cope, Peter would encourage me to play in church. Peter eventually got me in church on the electric guitar. He asked for some riffs over the top of all the music as Craig Cope was on the acoustic. All I knew was the blues scale, so I applied it to every song! As you can imagine it worked tremendously well when it was the right key, but it was also disastrous in some songs. Peter never minded too much at all though, he would simply encourage me. You could tell he loved it when it was working well. He would look over and get right into the music.

He always enjoyed a touch of rock in worship. This was one of my first experiences of playing in church. Peter was a great worship leader; he was full of so much life. He had amazing energy, drive and passion for music. Even when it was obvious that I was not quite there yet as a church musician, Peter remained an encourager to me.

He would bust out the acoustic guitar and sing to us in class at school. Peter Sullivan would perform in chapel sometimes as well. He would play original Christian music and then, on Sundays, he would be leading worship again. He was way into what he did, so much so that he could embarrass me at times. He would discuss church with me in class in front of everyone, but upon reflection I'm glad he did. He had a very practical and open faith. He lived out what he sang about.

Robin Man and Peter Sullivan were two important mentors in my development as a Christian musician. It helped me to see what I wanted to become and do in the future! Andrew and I had not put all of the pieces together, but we now had key role models that were influencing both of

us at the same time. It was somewhat a subconscious thing at the time. When you're young you're very focused on putting your own original stamp on things – you think everything you're doing is completely new and different. In some ways what we were about to do was totally unique but, at the same time, we were simply being shaped by God as the next generation of Christian musicians. Robin Man and Peter Sullivan played an extraordinarily important role, in that they helped us to visualize and hear original Christian music.

Peter Sullivan passed away on Saturday, July 24, 2004. He died a young man at the age of 46. This loss was sudden and unexpected. Peter completed several worship albums in his short life. He was the director of *Music to the World*, an independent internet worship project.

Peter devoted much of his life to Christian music. He was a worship leader, a science teacher and a family man. I regret not having the chance to work with him on a worship project; I would have loved to do so. I greatly miss his driving force, which he placed behind original worship music at the church.

I do however feel blessed to have had Peter as a teacher and key musical mentor. Later in life I worked with Peter as a teacher and colleague for a short period of time. He was a genuine and authentic Christian artist, full of energy and life. It was a sad death because he had so much more life to give to the world. I pray that God may use all that Peter Sullivan did do for His purpose, plans and glory.

Peter's death was a thunderstorm for me and for my church community. It was a time of rain. Through this time however God shone His love on us. I think it is God's love that creates the beautiful rainbow in difficult times. God continues to shine His light through the darkness. In our hardest times, in the most difficult circumstances, often God puts a rainbow in the sky.

Peter's death only inspires me to live life more. I can see that God has something more for me to be through people like Peter Sullivan. Peter was a Christian artist who would have inspired anyone! He was truly inspirational and an encourager to me always.

Peter was a beautiful Jesus rainbow to me! I pray that he is now singing and worshipping God in heaven.

Our Captain

.....

Our Captain, is a mighty God
He's full of truth and mercy
His peace surrounds us with love
I wonder, the way I follow
At times my faith is shallow
Still He makes me stronger
Every hour
Take me to mystery
Where only peace is found
I've tried so hard to look
To find this solid ground
In hope I live each day
To only follow you
Through the dark of misery
Your sun comes shining through
I seem to feel this joy
When sorrow comes along
To fill a lonely heart
To give me a new song

ARTIST *Peter Sullivan* ■ BAND *Bellevue Heights Baptist Church Band*

SONG *Our Captain* ■ RECORD *All Creation Shouts* © 1996

CHAPTER 3

Hardcore Kids

.....
1995

*The thing is God doesn't make any junk,
as clichéd as that is, it's so true, everyone is so
unique and special and as geeky as someone
might be, God thinks they're great.*

Lachlan Johnston/Shane Shepherd, *Geek Got The Window Seat*
THE FRUGALS

I THINK WE CAN GET PUSHED AROUND a lot on planet earth. This may be at school, at work or even at home. As humans we can be moved around spiritually as well. It takes God's help for us to learn how to stand up for our faith and how to be like Daniel from the Bible.

The Underground bands would teach me to speak strongly for God and to express Jesus' message of salvation to the world although I did travel a long journey before I learnt this lesson for myself. It took some years for me to be able to communicate my own faith strongly. I needed to know how much God valued and loved me as a person. To God people are not junk, He values us and thinks we're great! We are never labelled as a geek by God.

I have been pushed around myself. I believe life is often a spiritual

battle and even a bus ride to school can be war. In Year 8, I had to sit up the front of the bus. If I would try to sit too far back then I would be forced physically to move, in rather a violent fashion. I worked out where I could sit safely without being harassed. As a young boy I was also guilty of being a part of the bus abuse cycle. Unfortunately a bad day and boredom is a terrible mix for boys of all different ages.

In later years some older students targeted me. They would kick the chair behind me as hard as they could. This would send me forward. These kids then pulled up my tie to the point where it would strangle me. On a really bad ride this would continue lots of times. Sometimes you would have to move; but even then they would come and get me.

There was definitely an abuse cycle happening on the bus ride to school. For most of my school days I was on the end of it. A couple of times I was taken to quite badly. There was one older student who went at me for long periods of time. I was going red in the face and I was desperate for him to stop. He would repeat this strangling motion over and over again.

I would pick myself up at the end of the ride and get on with my life. I never complained enough, no one ever told the teachers nor did anything about it – it was simply our school bus culture. I don't think I even ever told my parents. I accepted it as a part of life. Abuse on the bus was unfortunately normal for me.

I was obviously a geek to some of these older students! I would never say anything negative to them; however they just did not like me for some reason. There was one student who hated me and this hate spread as he shared his feelings with other students. Then other students would dislike me even though I had not done anything to them or said anything. Why do you think hate is such a problem in this world? What is the central cause of hate?

Amongst my close school friends and youth group friends I felt valued and important as a person. On the bus, however, I was at times left feeling isolated, abused and on the outer. I was left to feel like a geek, but geeks are cool people anyway. Some of the most awesome people on the planet are geeks! Yet you still have to live your life with this feeling of being undervalued as a person. Bus rides certainly put a dent in my self esteem.

From these experiences on the bus I learnt what it feels like to be a target of hate, to be a geek and an outsider. However we know that God values and loves all people. When you think you're nobody, you can rest

assured that God loves and values you. God thinks you're great. He extends His love to the sinners and to the saints in the schoolyard and in life.

I had worked hard at school to fit in and be accepted, as most teenagers do. For some it comes naturally while others work at it intensely hard and some never care less. I was in the working-hard category. I had to work at fitting in with people. Sometimes I would seem to have success and yet other times I would fail. I used to turn the whole popularity thing into a bit of a game to try and help me fit in.

Andrew Lang had helped me more than anyone else at school socially. Having a close friend with similar Christian values gave me stability. Andrew had lots of friends and he drew me into his friendship group. They were an exceedingly cool group of friends. I found myself with star footballers, prefects and talented musicians. It was a strange school day to have such good positive friends and then to travel home on the bus and be abused. It was a real mix for me right up until the end of year 11. By the time I had got to Year 12, things were a lot better. Bus life was much more peaceful when you were an older student.

In 1995 I was in Year 12. Our four-piece band was starting to get a bit more serious about things. We had progressed from simply jamming for a few years to now actually playing full-length covers. I remember one practice we were discussing who would sing. We all had a go, but none of us were amazing singers. I think Andrew had the best range, so he was it! He won more by default really. Andrew took on the role of lead vocals. He was never a natural singer, but he could belt out a tune and he was a hard worker. He had a good memory with lyrics. Andrew would continue to work on his vocals and improve a lot over time. In Year 12, he was still very raw, but not ever afraid to have a go!

In one of our early practices we had a neighbour belting loudly on the back yard fence with a spanner. He was shouting at us and telling us to stop practicing. That was the end of that practice! We called ourselves the Dented Fences after this incident, as the man was denting the fence in trying to get us to stop. That's how we got our band name.

At the time it's impossible to see how your current experiences with the band will help you in the future. I could not see any further at this point. Year 12 was a big enough thing to be going through. I had dreamed for years about doing a lunchtime concert and playing in

chapel and then all of a sudden we were doing it. I was living my dream, which was actually as far as I had progressed in my thinking about music to that stage in my life.

The Dented Fences entered a Triple J band competition. We did our first ever recording in the school chapel and then later we went to Andrew's church. I can remember being very proud of the demo tape. It was a good step for the band. We now had our own little recording; although we never released it as from memory we mainly recorded covers. I'm not sure we had a full idea of the competition requirements as Triple J support original music. The Fences had not fully developed original material as yet. All the same, this was good recording experience for us. We had one original song, even if it was very raw. I can remember not even knowing the chords.

"What do I play?" I asked.

"Just play along," they said.

The song was certainly not refined.

The Fences then played our first ever real show in Year 12. We played at the school social as support band to Goofy Footer, a popular local band at the time. We mainly played a whole heap of covers. On the other hand, Goofy Footer was a well established and polished local band. I can remember being impressed to be playing with them. They had stickers and CDs and they let us use their massive amps. It finally felt as if we were doing it. It felt like a real show!

I won a Goofy Footer CD on the night for moshing the hardest in the crowd. I used to go hard when I first started out getting into bands. It's a fun time when you first get into music. I would jump around to it with all my energy. I really enjoyed the night and it inspired me to keep going on with things. It's amazing how one good day can inspire you for a long time. That show motivated me to go on with band life. It encouraged me to further create and work on my own original music.

I did not have much of an idea about the local band scene at all in 1995. Goofy Footer was the one and only local band that I had seen, but I had liked them a lot. I was impressed with what a local band could do. High School house friend Chad Atkin was way into the local band scene. He knew all the bands as he went to many shows with his friends. I was always interested to hear band stories from Chad.

About half way through Year 12 he mentioned to me that he

was way into Embodiment. He said that they were his favourite band at the time. He loved the heavy hardcore music. I was mainly into punk and '90s music at the time, but Chad was already into hardcore. He used to love going to the Underground [That was the first time I had ever heard of the Underground or Embodiment]. Chad mentioned that it was a Christian venue, but I never really connected the fact that there was a Christian scene starting up or that there were more Christian bands going around. I simply took it on face value and didn't think about the Christian music scene much further at the time [That was the first time I heard about the Underground].

I realised very early on that every generation seemed to be going harder and harder in regards to the energy and intensity of the music that they would play. Embodiment was one of the school kids' favourite bands as they were so intense. I think they were a band that could match where the kids were at. Hardcore music was in, as it fuelled adrenalin sports like bodyboarding, skateboarding and surfing at the time. It was almost compulsory to have it running in the car as you headed down for a surf. There were a lot of body-boarders and skaters at my school. There was a big punk and hardcore culture amongst the students at the time.

Embodiment started out jamming in the early '90s. It was actually a Christian metal band called Mortification that got Darren Reid, the lead singer from Embodiment, inspired early on. Mortification was one of the first Underground heavy metal bands in the scene. They were one of the pioneers in Australia behind Christian metal. This band helped to motivate Darren Reid to start Embodiment. In fact the members of Embodiment formed at a Mortification show. However it took a solid three months of jamming before the band turned out their first song.

Aaron Harslett, the original drummer from Embodiment, remembered the first early jams. He told me that the band started out playing on just fifteen watt amps.

"It didn't matter though because I was playing so softly on the drums to start with," he said

"But in the end, it was the reverse. We all had to turn up our amps to match Aaron on the drums.' Darren Reid replied.

This was quite a humble beginning for the band, but Embodiment would soon become the cornerstone of the whole scene. A lot of what was

to come in Australian Christian music was built upon Embodiment. From these early jams in the '90s they would become one of Australia's premier Christian hardcore acts. It was their constant effort and commitment to the Underground that helped to build the Christian music scene in Australia.

Darren discussed with me, the early shows at the original venue. Embodiment's first gig was at the Gawler Place Underground establishment. Steve from Mortification put the initial shows together with Embodiment. The organization had progressed from house parties to now a basement venue. Embodiment played an important role in the establishment of these early shows at the original complex.

Embodiment then progressed to play some shows in the Adelaide scene. There just wasn't enough Christian gigs going around at that stage and they were always a band that was connected and respected in the secular band scene as well. Embodiment could mix it up with the heaviest of bands. They had this raw energy that was hard for any band to match.

Sometimes name changes are forced. Originally Embodiment 12:14 were simply known as Embodiment. However there was another band in the US also named Embodiment. This band eventually got quite big and was signed to a large Christian label called Tooth and Nail Records. After discussions with the band, the Australian based Embodiment decided to add a Bible verse to their name. They searched and searched and found a Bible verse that they were happy with. The verse comes from Philippians 3: 12-14. This name change did not actually take place until several years down the track.

While I was still at school doing Year 12, the Christian scene made a huge step forward in 1995 with the start of the Waymouth City Street venue. This would provide Embodiment 12:14 with a home base. The Underground would give Christian music a city central venue that was well accessible to all people in Adelaide, South Australia. Steve Rowe from Mortification felt called to continue the scene with the Underground as the venue's name. Steve wanted to keep the original name, so it was then, the Underground was reborn. Original Christian music now had a permanent home in Adelaide.

Crowd surfing was huge at the establishment right from the start. Embodiment was well formed by this time and they were already developing quite a strong reputation and following. Embodiment was one band that

kids loved to mosh to. Kids were all excited by the pure heaviness and energy of Embodiment 12:14. Moshing was huge back then. Moshing is a type of dancing where people push and slam into each other. It was the art of jumping around and just totally getting into the music with all your being. The whole crowd would move in motion to the music. Crowd surfers would constantly be held up by members watching the bands. It was full on, and hardcore kids moshed as hard as anyone! Crowd surfing has subsequently been banned by most venues, as it can get very rough and dangerous at times. Although it was generally pretty safe at the Underground, all the same it was full on! Embodiment 12:14 music was so heavy, it suited the trend of moshing and crowd surfing right down to a tee.

Early shows were a lot of fun at the site. There were few all age venues in Adelaide, so when the Underground started up many of these hardcore kids came from everywhere. The early shows were packed out. There was a great vibe about the place early on.

“It had a real fun atmosphere,” said Aaron from Embodiment.

Back then there was not even a stage at the premise. Kids used to just pile on at the front where the bands were playing. The shows were intense, it was all very raw and it was an exciting time of the movement. Darren mentioned to me that in the beginning everyone was open about their faith.

“The whole scene was new. There was lots of energy. It was a real fun time,” Darren said.

Kids came to a point of wanting to express their own faith through the culture of the time. Front man and lead singer from Embodiment 12:14 Darren Reid first got into hard rock and then slowly progressed into heavier and heavier music. He was hugely inspired to do something based on his own personal beliefs. He wanted to share his faith through heavy metal and hardcore music.

It was not easy to find heavy Christian bands in Australia you liked, prior to this era. Embodiment 12:14 were very much feeling the same thing. In fact they were much further progressed, refined and down the track then, in comparison to where I was at. Darren Reid from Embodiment said that he found it hard to find Christian hardcore bands that he really liked.

“A lot of the heavy music was pretty dark lyrically speaking,” he said. He was inspired to do something and express his own point of view. He hoped that other Christians would also identify with this.

Andrew and I were in the same line of thinking as Darren. Lang reflected with me, there actually was not a lot of Christian music that we liked at the time. When we first were getting started the Christian international scene was still very vacant. There was a lot of room for new bands. There was a real need for new Christian artists. Kids were in desperate need of positive music. The Underground venue spawned out of an authentic need for new original Christian bands.

Embodiment 12:14 met the needs of people; they were winning the spiritual battle of the time by supporting the kids with what they were into. I think that was one of the reasons God blessed Embodiment 12:14 so much. They brought Jesus to the hardcore kids. I believe God truly valued these children by providing them with music.

I think that's why so many kids got into the local scene; they were into it because it was different. It was unique compared to what else was happening in the world lyrically speaking. Yet musically, it was similar to the culture of the time. Andrew Lang was right though – back in the beginning there was not much Christian music going around that kids liked. I think this made bands such as Embodiment even more important.

Despite all this going on at the Underground I was still largely ignorant to Christian music culture and to Embodiment 12:14. I did not head out that much to band shows in Year 12, so I never made contact with the scene. The Underground was somewhat of a distant thought for me. My high school band remained largely focused on playing at parties, in chapel services and at lunch time shows. The Dented Fences never ventured outside of the school realm.

Year 12 was about study, football and music. School life was my life apart from youth group and church. I started to get an increasingly high amount of hamstring injuries when I was playing football at school in Year 12. I would have to resign to being the injured captain in the Twos. I would get fit for a while and then my hamstrings would go. My lower back fracture, caused by jumping off the jetty, was one of the main reasons behind this problem.

Hamstrings are a complicated injury and I could never get them right. Even after a long preseason without injury I would still come down with a hamstring tear. It became a recurring problem for me. I really should have stopped coming back, but I loved football. I spent half of the year walking around with a hamstring tear. It was a painful way to live life.

These injuries further pushed me into the world of music. I'm sure that jumping off the jetty was when I first injured my back, but football would further aggravate the injury. I must have torn and strained my hamstrings around ten times before I would finally learn how to fix them up and make them strong again. I would not learn this, though, for many years to come. Injuries kept me out of playing sport, which forced me to pick up the guitar much more often that year.

Our first ever band sponsor gave us free sunglasses. We proudly wore them for an outdoor gig. They were so dark it was actually difficult to play and they slid off a few times. Andrew loved the whole rock image. Sunglasses and a show came naturally to him and he enjoyed having some fun with music. I remember relaxing a bit more at this gig and simply enjoying the sunshine and the rock sunnies! It's definitely a good life experience playing music in the sun to a friendly crowd of people.

The Fences played at a friend's eighteenth birthday party. It was one of my favourite shows for the year. Getting together with all your friends and playing popular covers made for a great evening. By that stage we had established ourselves as the school rock band. It's funny when you're young you always look up to the Year 12s playing music and then before I knew it we were doing it. It was an exciting time for me. These early shows got us motivated and way into music.

Our band played in several Chapel services. I remember being involved in a big end of year chapel band. We joined a couple of bands together to finish things off. I remember having two drummers going at the same time; it was a huge sound. We had a lot of fun with the band and with other friends and musicians.

The Dented Fences was not a Christian band as such. We weren't connected to the Christian music scene at the time. Andrew and I were simply Christians playing rock and punk covers. We were learning how to practice and play music as a band. We were learning the basics at school.

Our first group was only the start of things to come. Andrew and I were still very much learning and discovering what it meant to be Christian musicians and how we would live our lives. We were both into bands and we were Christians, however we were not fully aware of the Underground Christian scene for quite some time to come. I don't think we had much of a picture of how to go about things as Christian artists. We definitely

had not joined all the dots together. We had seen Christian music mentors but now we needed to learn how to put this into practice.

Band life did help to shape my identity a lot as a person. It was something I did at school as I loved it with a passion. The band helped me to be accepted in the schoolyard. I grew my hair long and I was in a band. Everyone loved bands at that time which solved most of my social problems. If you were in a band then you were safe. It was almost a defence against the world.

At the time however I felt that the world viewed Christian musicians as geeks. I'm not sure that everyone saw the true value of what Peter Sullivan and Robin Man were doing in high school. Most people would make jokes about it. The true value of their labours would come out in Christian musicians in the years to come. I have heard several musicians talk about how big an influence Robin Man and Peter Sullivan actually were on them as they grew up and formed their own identity. However it would take time for the wisdom of these mentors to grow in Andrew and myself.

Street culture was in fashion. It was quite a heavy period for me as a Christian because if you did not get things right people would let you know about it. Body boarding helped me out a lot in this department. It gave me an identity. It helped to give me a base in the world. There was a big focus on wearing the right labels. If you weren't wearing the right brands at school then you were considered a geek. Body boarding helped me to find my identity as a person. I was in a band, I was a surfer and this would provide me with acceptance and identity as an Australian boy.

I was always working hard on identity in high school. I was searching for self constantly. I would look to others to help shape my own self image. I did a lot of things for that reason. I did things to fit in, or because I liked someone who did it. That's how important Christian mentors are. Kids are constantly looking for direction through people. It was important for me to find who I was. I had a growing sense of self identity once I discovered music and surfing and this allowed me to develop and grow in confidence as a person.

At that stage in my life I was looking for direction and identity a lot through secular bands and church music, although I had not put the two together at all. They were still completely separate objects for me. I would play secular tunes with my band, the Fences, and then I would play in

church occasionally. I had no realisation that I could put the two together.

The Holy Spirit was however already at work. Christian artists wanted to play current music; they wanted to express their art like anyone else, but they also wanted to express Jesus. “So you’re young, well that’s alright, no matter who you are, don’t believe that there’s nothing to say, nothing to say.” [*Nothing to Say*, **Antiskeptic**]

There was something to communicate, alright. The story of Jesus needed to be shared to this generation of kids and it was the Underground bands that were about to do it.

The mainstream Church at the time was not quite on the same level as the kids and the CD stores were not yet either in line, but there must have been thousands and thousands of kids wanting to hear this kind of youth culture music, because it was born everywhere around 1995! The Underground had its own unique message and style which it projected onto this world, but at the same time it was a part of a world Christian original music revival.

The youth had a story to tell. It’s not that the church had got it wrong all of a sudden. I think it was more that the youth needed their own voice through music. They needed to be listened to. It is important that kids are given a chance to communicate in order to encourage them, motivate them and inspire them to help others and help themselves. Music was one way for the youth of the time to be heard and to communicate Jesus. Now I would have to wake up to the full potential of the Underground band venue myself. The Church was also about to discover what was happening at the venue.

I believe God can use anyone for His purpose and plans. When the world considers a person to be a geek, a misfit or an outsider, God considers this very same person to be vitally important and He calls them to build His kingdom here on planet earth and in heaven. Even the Underground band venue was at first considered to be an outsider and a misfit by the Church before people really knew what was going on. However over time respect for the venue grew. The bands were simply a part of Jesus’ purpose and mission to bring salvation to us. To God these bands were not junk, He valued the groups and thought we were great!

Geek Got The Window Seat

.....

Another day rolls by and you're off to school
Just another chance to play the fool
You trip on the stairs with your oversize feet
The jerk up the back is kicking your seat
Looking out the window ...

Geek got the window seat
Geek got the window seat
Enjoy your view
Geek got the window seat
Geek got the window seat

WORDS *Lachlan Johnston/Shane Shepherd* ■ MUSIC *Shane Shepherd*
BAND *The Frugals* ■ RECORD: *Nowhere to Hide* © 2005

CHAPTER 4

Waking up to the Underground

.....

1996

*This is your wakeup call today;
I'm a God whose love will never fail.
I will never turn my back on you;
I will never let you down.*

Aaron Mabikafola, *Wake Up Call*
HOMETIME

IN 1996 I REQUIRED A PERSONAL WAKEUP CALL. I needed to know my role as an artist. I still had to establish my purpose as a Christian in this world, for I did not have a clear direction. I had grown up in the Christian education system and I had a Christian family but, by this time, I had fully drifted into the world of secular music. It is not that world music is wrong, good music is important, but I don't think that alone was God's plan for my life.

The problem for me at the time was that with my interest in world music came a worldly approach and a way of living life that was not based on Christian values. I desperately needed to see and get to know more

Christian artists. I needed young Christian role models to help guide and direct my path. In 1996 I would get a wakeup call and hear about the Underground band scene a little bit more.

The year began with some window cleaning. Andrew and I decided we would head out cleaning car windows for some extra cash to develop our equipment. We struck the perfect day for it. It was hot and dusty and business was booming! We made very good money in just a couple of hours. People would always ask us what the money was for. Drivers were actually quite encouraging and pleased to hear that we were raising money for equipment. It all went well, but we never mustered up the courage to do it ever again as we thought it was illegal, so that was the end of our ground breaking fund raising efforts. Andrew and I retired after a promising start. It was back to looking for gigs for the Dented Fences.

Shows were not exactly a plenty for us, so we turned our efforts elsewhere. Cleaning windows was not the last of Andrew's fund raising ideas. Andrew had a good business sense, similar to his father. He could spot a buck to be made and saved here and there, which always came in handy for us as poor musicians starting out.

Andrew was keen to do some busking in town to raise some more funds for equipment. I had to put steel strings on my three-quarter acoustic to make it loud enough but the guitar wasn't designed for this much pressure. We went into town and made a few bucks busking, but not really enough to encourage us to keep pursuing this line of work, although it was still a good life experience to be a busker for a day! My first guitar however suffered for it and it began to bow from the increased pressure caused by the steel strings. With my acoustic guitar out of action, that was the end of busking for me.

Although I totally love street artists, I must admit that busking was not my thing and I had no desire for a part time job. However I was way into original music. I was not a good guitar student, but I came totally alive when I started to write songs. I first got into original song writing in the summer of 1995-96. I had explored things a little bit in Year 12 but now I was writing lots of tunes. I started off mainly writing music with a few basic melodies. I never cared too much about the lyrics to start with. They were not important to me at all; it was all about the music.

I loved original music. I would get totally into writing lots of surf

thrash songs. I was also influenced by mid '90s alternative rock, grunge and punk. I went from a guitarist who never practiced to a person who was often found living on my guitar for a whole afternoon. That summer felt like the longest summer ever after doing Year 12. I was no longer a school student; I was now a student of original music not that I considered this to be work at all. It was play; it was fun to explore.

That summer Andrew and I learnt to write songs together. Lang and I worked out how to write music together very early on in the piece. A couple of times I would come up with a guitar pattern and Andrew would help out with melody lines and lyrics. Our first ever song together was called *Away*. It was a surf song. Our interests were coming out in our music. Working together teaches you to think outside of your own box. Writing songs with Lang was an important step for us; it led to more creative songwriting sessions down the track. Collaborative writing can help you to form and develop songs further than you possibly could do by yourself. It is actually the beauty of being in a band.

When the summer ended I went off to University to study teaching. Band life was put on the back burner a bit. Andrew had decided to take a year off study to further pursue music. The Dented Fences played a few shows that year and we did at a couple of eighteenth birthday parties but things were not progressing enough for the band after Year 12. We were all into music, but we had no idea of what steps to take to achieve our dreams.

Andrew and I had developed a few original songs by this stage for the band, but at the same time we were still playing mainly covers. Frustration at a lack of progress was growing. Andrew had lots of free time and the band was not practicing nearly enough for his liking. His ambitions were not being met by the Fences.

Our bass player Adam Hooper left the band, as he was already involved in another group that was going well. He did not like Andrew's vocals that much, and, to be fair, Andrew was rough to start with. He would later grow into a true performer who could belt out a song but, to start with, Andrew was still working on strengthening his vocals. He was not a natural singer, but rather someone who worked very hard to develop his singing. The Dented Fences was then without a bass player and after some discussion we decided midway through 1996 to call it day.

I had it in the back of my mind that I may be able to start up a new band with my youth group friend Jeremy Owen. Things would not eventuate for sometime though. It was back to being a bedroom guitarist again for a while. Andrew and I remained good friends, but Uni life kept me occupied and we did not get together that much to play music after the Dented Fences ended.

With the Fences finishing off procedures, I decided to have one more go at football in 1996. I went out to play with some church friends in a low grade for a bit of fun. Again I had a big preseason and I got quite fit before tearing a hamstring in Round 2. These events that had weakened my back – first the jumping off the jetty and now a run of hamstring injuries. That was the end of football for me. Football was over for sure! So after bouncing back to football at the end of the Dented Fences, I soon bounced straight back to music again. I started writing more original songs.

While I was writing original music at home, new Underground bands were emerging. Punk music was becoming increasingly popular. More and more kids were getting into original Christian music. The scene was growing; and new international records would have a huge influence on the Christian community. Original Christian punk music had found its way into record stores and this would inspire many bands in the future.

Finding punk music for the first time is a revelation in itself. Finding Christian punk music was a totally new discovery for Australian youths in the mid '90s. It was a wakeup call for many Christians. Christian punk rock music gave young people a way of expressing their faith in this world. It was a way to communicate, culturally speaking. Sam Barnes from Seraphs Coal discovered the US punk band MXPX and after that he was completely into Christian punk rock. He liked the cool music with positive lyrics. Although they had not met as a band yet, both Dan Jones and Andre Dumuid were also getting into MXPX at a similar time as Sam Barnes. Christian punk rock had been discovered in Australia through bands like MXPX!

The boys from Seraphs Coal were becoming punk rockers themselves. Dan Jones thought that punk was not completely genre-specific at this stage which meant you were into quite a variety of sounds and bands. It was actually the Pokinatcha Album that came out in 1994 on Tooth and Nail Records by MXPX that first really got the members from Seraphs Coal fired up and keen to get more into band culture. Dan was way into

it. Christian punk music was the genre that would shape and influence Seraphs Coal and the Underground scene.

A lot of records were actually not that blatant. Seraphs felt like some of the Christian bands were hiding their faith a bit in their lyrics. They were motivated by a lack of direct Christian music. The boys from Seraphs were very fired up over the issue. They had the feeling in the end that there was no music out in record stores that they wanted to hear.

It was this desire to play strong Christian music that drove Seraphs further along the path of starting a punk outfit.

"We wanted to play music that we wanted to hear," said Dan Jones from Seraphs Coal. For this reason the band decided to strongly wear their faith on their sleeves. No one would ever question what they were on about; it was always so obvious.

Adelaide had quite a strong secular punk and heavy metal scene prior to 1996. The music was pretty heavy in those days. Moshing was intense and a critical part of shows back then. The Adelaide scene had already established a strong down south punk and hardcore movement, although Dan Jones saw that Adelaide venues were not yet fully developed at this stage. I think Dan was referring to the further progress still yet to be made in regards to management and venues. It was all there but at the same time there was a lot of growth to be made. Punk was going from something small to something that everyone loved. Adelaide was always a strong punk and hardcore supporter.

Seraphs Coal met each other through an interesting series of events. Dan Jones first met Sam Barnes on a Christian camp. Together they were playing around on instruments. Dan started to go for it on the drums. This led Sam to hit the distortion pedal and away they went.

"Everyone was looking at us kind of strangely, but we enjoyed it," said Sam. Dan and Andre were already in a band at the time, but they were looking to start up something a little more serious. Sam bumped into Dan again at a gig for world peace.

"I've just got to start a band. Are you keen? Andre Dumuid is keen," Dan said and by October 1996 Sam was in and the band formed. Seraphs Coal had started. This one band would create massive interest in the Underground community.

Sam still recalls rocking up to practice for the first time. He pulled up

to Andre's house and there was another Renault 12 the same as his.

"What's going on here," he thought.

As he came in for the jam there was Andre play-fighting with an axe in the back yard. This made for a first jam that Sam would not forget. In the first practice the band came up with five new original songs and, a week later, they had drafted together fifteen songs. They had bonded well straight away. The band kept playing some of these early songs from the initial jams for a long time.

Some people instantly make an impression on you. Drummer, Aaron from Embodiment 12:14 recalled the first time he saw Dan Jones in action. It was around 1996/97 and Embodiment 12:14 were about to play another show, but Aaron was running late. He was still in the process of escaping work. Everyone was standing around waiting for the arrival of Aaron. When he finally rocked up Dan Jones jumped on the drums and sang out: "*Az-man's here; Az-man's here; Az-man's here!*"

Aaron recalled that was the first time he saw Dan Jones in action. Aaron called them the Waiting for Az-man band. He remembered that Dan Jones sounded sweet right from the get go!

When Seraphs Coal first started out they dreamed that they would one day be good enough to play with Jemima. Guitarist from Wone, Adrian Woithe, or *Woff* as he is affectionately known to his friends, told me that Jemima was a big influence on him also. Jemima were an early Underground band who played jangle indie rock music. They were well loved and had a strong following in the early days of the Underground scene. Australian indie rock was quite big around 1994-98 and Jemima grew to be popular early in the piece. Woff said that he picked up on the whole excitement and vibe of the Underground in those early years, and Jemima were key players in it.

Hardcore music was always popular with Embodiment 12:14 but it was actually punk music that was big around 1996-97. Embodiment were definitely inspiring new bands but, at the time the younger kids were inspired to start up a punk band. Watching Embodiment 12:14 at the Underground was also my first experience of the scene. The pure intensity of the show surprised me. I was in the mosh in those days and I also came away from the show truly inspired to start a band.

The shows back then in 1996 were high energy and moshing was

huge. At times the complex would be like a Hungry Jacks smoke stack. Steam would be rising out of the crowd and pouring out of the windows. But everyone looked after each other; people were much more careful than the average show. There was a real brotherhood thing going on. It was a very social scene. Lots of friendships came out of that residence. But yeah, moshing was a huge part of the early shows back then. The pure energy of the place was inspiring people to start up bands. I was definitely not the only kid feeling this way.

When the Fences finished, I started making a couple of demo tapes. I did not have a set plan to start out a new band; it was more something that naturally evolved. I kept writing tunes and recording them. I had a chat with Jeremy Owen from Youth Group about what I was doing and he was keen to listen to a demo tape. That discussion was really the beginning of our new band.

God then provided me with a new group. We formed in November 1996. I was way into music at that stage. More so, I was into writing songs on my electric guitar. I used to record and make demo tapes on an old tape recorder. I would add in a tapping pencil to try and create a snare sound. I gave my first demo tape to good friend and drummer Jeremy Owen. He listened to it at school with all his mates piled in his yellow Toyota Corolla. He and his friends must have liked the demo as Jeremy was way keen to start a band with me after that!

The rest of the band soon took shape. I was later talking to Andrew Lang and I mentioned I was starting a new band. Without any hesitation, he was in straight away; I didn't have to ask him. Andrew gave us as a band, a lead guitarist and singer. Jeremy Owen some time later invited a younger school friend Nick Robinson to join the band as our bass player. The line up was somewhat quickly set and solid. The band was fully formed by late November 1996; we were now well under way! I had a new band! It's a great feeling when you are eighteen.

Finding a band name can be a difficult process. The origin of our band name has many stories, but the real truth of it is that it came off an amp Andrew was using at the time. We had our first show coming up and we were nameless. Andrew and I were in his house and we were desperately coming up with names. We liked Lessie off Andrew's amp, basically because it was original. Then it was: "What does Lessie do? *Lessie just does*... Lessie

Does” and that was the end of it. We were Lessie Does.

The band name didn’t have a Christian meaning or anything like that; it was simply an original name. Even after we connected with the Underground music scene I don’t think it ever crossed our minds to change our name. We liked it because it was fun and original and it always got people thinking about it and playing with the words. The media always found a line out of it. Lessie Does would remain our band name for the whole journey.

Lessie never set out specifically to join the Underground scene in 1996 like Seraph’s Coal and Embodiment 12:14. We were not intentionally a Christian band, although three out of the four of our members were Christians. We had simply come together and formed a band by that November. The rest of our story simply evolved and grew out of relationships with the wider scene.

I had no idea of the early problems that the Underground community were facing, other than to say that my parents did question the value of Christian punk rock. There were some questions about the style of music and lyrics; *was this new music Christian at all?* The wider church body did express some concerns about this relatively new form of Christian music to start with in 1996. The venue experienced some flak from churches. However the church community changed their mind when they saw the fruits of the music.

Jesus does not like religion without fruit either. So you better have some fruit to show, otherwise what are you doing? Christian bands need to be honest with themselves. It’s true that we are all guilty of being all show without fruit at times. We need to examine ourselves and find the fruit that God is producing within us.

The Underground had the ability to bring people from all walks of life to God. This brought about a huge paradigm shift in the church. It changed views. Youth leaders experienced firsthand people coming to know and love Christ through the music and the bands. Kids were discovering a lot; really God likes this type of music? This brought a reality that they could connect with God on a creative level as well. It took some time for the wider church to adjust to this new position but they did come on board several years down the track. However 1996 was still a time of questioning for the church in Australia.

The wider Church needed a wakeup call to the needs of the youth. I was really just waking up to the Underground venue myself; I had not fully captured the vision of what God had planned for Lessie Does and the wider band community. The Underground was beginning to be identified by churches as a good place for the youth. The Church had to decide what its response would be to this new form of Christian art.

Some churches were early to get on board while others would take some time. Original punk and hardcore were relatively new things for the body of Christ. In 1996 Australia was waking up to original Christian music – things were starting to get moving. It was all about to happen.

Wake Up Call

.....

Will you? Won't you?
 Realise before it's too late
 I can't tell you or make the choice
 Only you can make
 Since the day that you were born
 I have called out your name
 Still you want no part in me
 Still you carry your own shame
 When you breathe your last
 And close your dying eyes
 What side of the fence
 Will you be on?
 This is your wakeup call today
 I'm a God whose love will never fail
 I will never turn my back on you
 I will never let you down

ARTIST *Aaron Mabikafola* ■ BAND *Hometime*
 RECORD *Bought with Blood, Album* © 2004

CHAPTER 5

Lessie Does

.....

1997

*Can you hear them sing?
It's all right, all right now,
we will not give in.
We're in sight of home now.*

Darren Thompson, *Braving the Day*
THINKTANK

SOME DAYS ARE EASIER THAN OTHERS. 1997 would give me some of my fondest memories ever in life, yet it would also give me some of my hardest. By braving the day, I mean that some days you have to be brave to get through them. In order to survive, you must not give in, for we are in sight of home now; we are in sight of heaven.

The band was on the move. In the summer of 1996-97, Lessie Does went down to Andrew's beach house. This is where things really got started for us. We jammed out five or so songs. The band had some good times creating music! The day would consist of surfing, jamming, eating, skateboarding and playing eight ball. Then we would do it all again the next day, and again, and again. It gave us that ultimate feeling of an endless

summer. It was an epic time in our lives.

During this summer and early on in 1997 Lessie vocals were beginning to be refined. Three-part harmonies emerged in our music. The band was blessed to have three singers, so it was a natural progression for us as a band. I couldn't sing at all, but I would constantly encourage the band to develop this side of our songwriting. I could hear the potential of this vocal sound right from the start. I knew we were onto something here. The boys were gifted with good harmonies. This use of three-part melodies would become the group's trademark and later our signature sound.

US Christian bands would also further shape and refine Lessie's music. Both Andrew Lang and I are real big Switchfoot fans. They are a US Christian rock music group who cross over well from Christian rock to world poetry. They are respected both in the Christian music scene and now in the secular music world as well. Switchfoot always have an amazing vocal affect. They have carved a unique sound in the rock genre, which is not easy to do.

The first Christian record that I bought from a music store was actually Switchfoot, and I also bought an MXPX album. Switchfoot were a particularly big influence on my early song writing. I liked how they used both clean and distorted guitar sounds in the one song. I was right into this kind of indie rock transition. This was also to become one of Lessie's trademark sounds. We loved to switch from clean to distortion and back again in the one song. The US Christian music scene sure did influence us a lot more than we were first aware of.

Our vocals and general sound were developing, but there was practice trouble. It took the band a while to find a permanent practice home. A lot of this was a war of attrition to see which neighbours could handle the music. I remember some strong complaints when the band practiced at my house. One particular neighbour personally shut things down during the day and, he added, that we had a lot of work to do, especially in the vocal department. We tried all of our houses.

It turned out that Andrew's brick garage with a thick roller door was the best option. It must have been loud at times, but we only ever had the odd complaint, even after seven years of practice. We used to practice at night time too, until quite late, and still we survived. Andrew's garage gave Lessie Does a home base for the band's entire life span.

With a permanent practice home Lessie soon prepared for gigs. Our band came into the live music scene at an interesting time. Original music was growing in popularity again, but at the same time pokies were killing off the live band scene. Pubs were no longer paying groups for the night as the pokies were making a lot more money than the bands could bring in. Gambling was becoming more profitable than live music. This meant there were fewer venues around and there was less live music in the pubs. The hay day of Australian pub music was over. This style of music used to be a massive part of Australian culture. Rock was not dead, but it was sure bleeding!

With a growing void of less cover music around, this would create a whole new scene. Original music became a market that would grow again and be further explored and developed. Young adults and teens now preferred to hear original bands rather than cover music. The scene had shifted and changed again. Original music was in; only it wasn't in every corner pub.

Lessie Does was simply starting out in the secular music scene in 1997. We were beginning to do some gigs. However we did not even have a demo tape or anything at all to start with. We had nothing to project us into the secular music scene. As a band we were so raw. We did not have any real direction or plan behind what we were doing. We had simply started a band and we were keen to get out there and play.

Our bass player Nick Robinson was not even eighteen yet, so pub shows were a bit more difficult. For this reason we started out playing at parties; our first show was actually at a friend's eighteenth birthday. We were pretty excited to have a gig; we did some covers, and we also had a few originals by that stage.

Soon after our first show we played at McDonald's. Andrew used to work at McDonald's and he somehow got us a gig playing there. It was a strange show; we played covers and rock tunes while customers purchased burgers. It goes down as one of our most memorable shows ever! Lessie Does played at McDonald's! It was a lot of fun!

Out of these early gigs Lessie learnt to create shows in our community base. The McDonald's gig was actually good because it provided a way to build up a support network. Lessie built up a fan base by playing to school friends, churches and at work places in 1997. We were a real community

band before we broke onto the secular scene.

Actually having a strong community base is very helpful for a young band, it gives you great strength and a loyal support network. Lessie was prepared to play small shows to our community base mainly because we were keen to play and practice. These shows helped us to build up our own network of followers and supporters. We did not have a strategic plan to go out and do this, rather this is what did happen, but it seemed to work well. Lessie Does built up its own community.

It was time to record for the band. We needed a demo tape to break into the pub scene and to further progress. Parties and community shows had served us well, but we wanted to take things further. Plus, our friends were keen to hear our early work. Lessie Does soon prepared to record our first ever demo tape.

We had no idea about pre-production or anything like that; we simply just tried to make the songs as good as we could. It was our first go in a recording studio and I remember being very nervous about it all. However we were a reasonably tight band right from the start and things all went well that day. We took some cool photographs, which has helped me to remember our first effort in the studio with fond memories.

The demo tape was titled *Nemisis* after our favourite punk song on the recording; however it should have been spelt 'Nemesis'. I was actually to blame for the mistake on the front cover of the demo tape. Despite the spelling errors, the artwork goes down as a favourite for Lessie Does fans. The demo tape served its purpose. It got us moving and it helped us to get some much needed gigs.

We did not have a strong Christian message...yet! Our lyrics from the demo tape mainly reflected a world poetry perspective. The songs were not at all overtly Christian. We did not swear, but the topics were simply about surfing, people, enemies and life. We were very much a band on the edge of the Underground scene at that stage. Like many bands at the time, we had not fully developed our lyrics. Christian rock music was very much a new thing for us and we certainly did not have it down pat.

After a period of playing to our community and friends, Lessie Does then played our first pub show in 1997. Our demo tape helped us to get gigs. I remember we were pretty chuffed to have our name in lights for the first time. We all stood around the sign and had our picture taken. We

did a string of pub shows after that, playing covers. This generated some much needed cash for the band. We did some very interesting pub shows to say the least; however doing a stint playing covers did really help our songwriting to flourish.

Lessie learnt a lot about music through playing in pubs and doing covers. As a band, however, we were more interested in writing our own songs. Lessie soon grew tired of simply playing covers. We were looking to progress more to do original music in the secular music scene. The band had a world-based approach to our musical direction.

After a string of pub shows Lessie Does then began to further explore original music. Andrew and I would come together in the early days and work on songs. As a second year Uni student I had time to develop my songwriting skills. Our music was very much diversified right from the start. You could never really put Lessie Does in a box and say we were a punk band or a rock band because we were always both. Right from the start we explored several different styles of music. By now Lessie Does was an original band.

After an exciting start to the year a family death would hurt me. My Grandpa died on May 25, 1997. I remember the night as Lessie was playing our first ever show in our home Church. I got the news that night during practice that my Grandpa had died. I went into a state of pain and hurt but I felt that it was important we played in church that night. My Grandfather was a strong Christian man, and I think he would have liked me to play. That show was for my Grandpa.

My Grandma and Grandpa were the most beautiful couple in the world to me. They loved each other so deeply. They shared the kind of love that lasts forever and is inseparable. As a couple they travelled the world together and they loved me always; they loved all of us grand-kids with everything they had. They did not hold back on their love one bit.

I know my Grandmother loved me playing Christian music. She cared for me and gave me so much support over the years that words cannot describe. Grandma and Mum were my biggest supporters, without a doubt. Grandma was always cheering me on and encouraging me as I played God's music to people. My records greatly encouraged her and, in turn, she complimented me and lifted me up. That night in church I played for Grandpa, but I also played to celebrate the love that Grandma and Grandpa had taught me to share with other human beings.

We played a song called ‘Fairy Floss’ in church that night, it was written by Jeremy Owen. ‘Fairy Floss’ was our first overtly Christian song and it was our most blatant message as a band ever. Lessie would belt out this fast-paced Christian punk song. It was such a strong message and we would punk it out at all our shows. We went from world poetry to full-on Christian punk. It was a very fast and in your face style of tune. ‘Fairy Floss’ was a short, fast, little Australian larrikin style punk song. I think this was the first tune that we did as a band after our demo tape.

Jeremy Owen wrote the music and words to ‘Fairy Floss’. He was always a natural song writer. His understanding of all the instruments within the band allowed him to make songs that gelled together straight away. He did not have too many problems creating the song and style of music that he wanted. In ‘Fairy Floss’, Jeremy asks people to listen to the message in his lyrics. The chorus stated that: “only fools say He’s not there; they will die like floss at the fair”. This chorus was done with a nice three-part harmony.

The Church was experiencing Christian punk rock in its walls for the first time ever; on the night my Grandpa died. He was a man who would often brave the day, despite poor health for many years. He kept fighting on as long as he could. I’m glad I was able to brave this day for him.

I think my Grandfather would have liked these lyrics. His last words to me were: “Do not waste your life on the things of this world, but place your love upon your family.” Grandpa was a strong Christian man. His funeral was packed out. He was a well-loved and a popular man. Grandpa was a great role model to our whole family.

It was important to connect with the Church that night. Lessie Does now had the support of Bellevue Heights Baptist behind us. This community would prove to be one of our strongest allies. Key mentor Peter Sullivan was very encouraging to the band that night. It was important for me to realise how God could use the band. God was communicating through Lessie and also through the people around us. This would not be the last time I would hear God through people. Lessie Does had united with the Church for the first time.

There are some meetings you don’t forget. I’ll never forget meeting Seraphs Coal for the first time either. I first met Seraphs at a Christian youth Battle of the Bands competition in 1997. I had no idea who these

guys were at the time. We felt confident going into the band competition, now with the support of our whole church behind us, but Jeremy had heard that Seraphs Coal were a really good group.

I was blown away by the fact that they prayed for us before the competition. The Holy Spirit was working something special through them that night. God was communicating through the band. Still to this day it has left a big impact on me. Having a band pray for you in competition is not the usual experience. It was obvious to me that Christ was at work through Seraphs Coal. They had a massive crowd there to see them that night. They played awesome. I remember witnessing seeing Seraphs Coal; they sold a whole box of demo tapes that night, it was pretty impressive!

We also had our fans. Lessie Does had brought the entire Bellevue Heights Youth Group that night so we also had good support at the competition. Seraphs were clearly the best band on the night though. Lessie grabbed a well placed third in the final. We were reasonably happy considering it was early days for the band.

The same night we would also see Embodiment 12:14 play. Embodiment closed the competition off as a special guest band. They were not allowed to compete as they had already done a CD release. That was Lessie's official introduction to the Underground scene. Our local support group later became one of the biggest band networks in the Underground scene.

Sam Thomson was the man behind this support group. He was the key youth leader. Sam led the large Bellevue Heights Baptist Youth Group. This large group would supply Lessie with a loyal following. The youth groups evolved and ended up being highly supportive of the whole scene and not just of Lessie. The kids would turn out in their hundreds to Underground shows. It was the kids who would make it happen. Our home church played a massive role in this.

There were several famous band support groups that would emerge in the Underground movement. Without the kids the bands would have just been playing to empty walls. The 2 Bucks Crew were also known to be loyal supporters of the scene. They loved to go to a lot of shows, and they were recognised by their pure passion for Christian music and for the bands. They moshed hard in those early days.

The Underground venue supported not only these fan groups but also the bands themselves. The Underground had a nice little room out to the

side, for the bands. This room provided a good meeting place. It gave you a chance to chat to band members and management. Good relationships formed through gigs at the Underground. The chat room helped to establish relationships that would last for a life time.

However Lessie Does only ever did a handful of shows at the Underground. These gigs did play an important role as they connected us to the scene. It was where we further established relationships with Seraphs Coal and bands like Thinktank. The Underground provided Lessie with a meeting place.

When we first started playing we were kind of standing there on the stage, but by the end of our time at the Underground we would be rocking out a lot more. The venue helped the band to develop our live show. We would endeavour to match the other bands at the Underground. By watching lots of Christian bands I could see what they were doing and how hard they were working on stage. We were no longer standing around anymore; we would be jumping around! There was a huge amount of energy at these shows.

Lessie Does would never ever be a 100% full-on Christian band and so we never fitted completely into the usual Underground mould. Our bass player Nick was not a Christian and we thought it was not fair to go down that track with him. We were never going to be a Seraphs Coal or Embodiment 12:14 for that reason. Lessie Does was not as direct in our approach. Through our music we certainly made people aware that three of us were Christians. We would later talk and sing about our faith on our records, but we would always have some secular songs in the mix as well.

The strength of this approach for Lessie was that we could be in the world and also play Christian music. The band shared a Christian educational background. Lessie Does was a group that had essentially developed out of Immanuel College. We were all Immanuel boys, although we came from different year levels. Andrew and I were born in the same year. Jeremy was a year younger than us and our bass player Nick was two years younger than Andrew and I.

Around this time a young Immanuel College friend died. I was devastated to hear that school friend Chad Atkin had died in a car crash several years after Year 12. Our school was divided into House groups. Chad was a good House friend of mine. He had helped me get into bodyboarding and bands. It was Chad who first told me about the Underground.

He was a very influential young man on me. I followed Chad a lot. Chad was so cool to me. He was well loved by many people. He was a classic Australian surfer kid. He also loved skateboarding and bands and he lived it out. The last time I saw Chad he was surfing in a storm. If there was a storm then he would probably be out there surfing. His untimely death hit me hard. It made me a bit more numb inside. It makes you realise you're not bullet-proof at nineteen. Even so, it took me a few more years to put this wisdom into action. I found his death hard to deal with.

The death of a young Immanuel boy was difficult for the band; certainly it was hard for me. Life was happening so fast. It was all happening way out of control. There were some amazing days during this time and there were some days that I would have to brave. I would have to learn how to deal with the loss of loved ones in 1997.

When life is difficult it is important to focus on heaven. We are all in sight of heaven now. We need to hear the angels singing to us. Sometimes I think we can hear them singing through Christian music. One night after a performance Seraph's Coal told us that Lessie Does sounded like angels. Some nights the band would sing amazingly. It makes me wonder and question do the angels sing through Christian artists? I think they must.

Christian music and angels can help us to brave the day! Music helps us as we journey with God to heaven. It helps us to survive. It encourages us and lifts us up: "All I ask, take the path, find a love that just goes on and on ... it never ends." [**Hometime**, *Dan's favourite*]

Jesus asks us to take His path and follow Him. Christian music is a lifeline for us all; it helps us on our journey. It helps us in our travels with Jesus. Music is a gift from God. God calls us to worship Him. He calls us to praise Him in times of sorrow, tragedy and death; He calls us to be courageous as we face each day.

Lessie Does had certainly woken up to what was going on at the Underground by 1997. We were a band that was inspired by Christian punk rock groups, but also by the huge amount of energy that the Underground venue had. Christian punkers were taking over the scene. Punk was becoming big and everything was going punk! This was for me the most exciting time period as things grew so rapidly. The bands were getting better, the fans were growing in number and quality records were well on their way to coming out! It was boom time for the industry.

Braving the Day

.....

Can you hear them sing?
It's alright,
All right now,
We will not give in,
We're insight of home now
Leave these useless words, unsaid
These were the last words I could find
Though songs we're singing
Breaking could be justified
This is for all the times we try
When it's obvious through the circumstance
That breaking could be justified
Can you hear them sing?
It's alright,
All right now,
We will not give in,
We're insight of home now
Leave these useless words, unsaid
This is the last death that I will die
Emancipating,
Everything it signifies,
And to make all of this worthwhile
Through the obvious and the circumstance
In breaking could be justified
Here in lies the hope of all things,
The day we understand
In everything that I feared,
How could I leave you here?
Can you here them sing,
It's alright now,
We will not give in,
We're insight of home now
Leave these useless words, unsaid
We're in sight of home now,
How could I leave you here?

CHAPTER 6

Christian Punkers

.....

1997

*I can't change a thing or make mistakes disappear, I feel it
and until the end I'll be left, oh wondering, not over there
is so much ahead, not over no time for regret, not over so
much more to be done, not over I'm pressing on.*

Jeremy Brown/Nathan Purdie, *Pressing On*
WAYBACKWHEN

LESSIE WAS A SURFING BAND. We all surfed. Jeremy and I body-boarded, while our bass player Nick and Andrew surfed stand-up style. We would head out from Lang's shack at Middleton; this was our regular wave as it catered for us both, although we would venture down the coast from time to time in search of bigger waves. There's something special about sitting out in the surf with your friends. It makes for a good day. The band also did several long car adventures and surf missions together.

I remember a journey to York Peninsula, which has some of South Australia's best surf locations. The band was camping out in the hot summer. You used to have to drink lots of water and seek out shade and wear big hats all day long, otherwise you would end up dehydrated very quickly. The flies were always bad in the summer. Your whole back could be covered in

flies. You'd look over to your friend and his back would be just as covered, or worse. You'd go through all of this as you searched for epic waves.

When it was a flat spell at Yorks in the summer, you would question why the heck you were doing this. However when the surf was up and you were getting good waves, you knew exactly why you were there! You could get some quality surf down there. Yorks has so many good breaks, you just need to find the one that's working on the day with the right wind conditions and good swell direction.

Jeremy was pretty good at finding the best spots most days. He was definitely the most experienced and dedicated campaigner out of all of us. He can sure do some neat bodyboard moves. Jeremy would practice and practice to get his tricks down. He simply surfed for the love of it. He surfed way more than the rest of us, but we were still all ultra keen; it was just that Jeremy was super keen. If the surf was good we'd all be out there two or three times during the day, almost till our arms were falling off from exhaustion.

At the end of the day we crawled into the pub at night for a good meal. Then it would be back to the camp site and we would do it again, and again, as long as we could survive the flies. When your tolerance of the summer was over and you had heat-stroke, it was time to head home, but most times it was with good memories and good waves. Surfing was a part of the band; it came out in our music and everything we did. The two went together.

Some things in life you'd like to do differently. Some days you would like to start over again and make mistakes disappear. It was not so much as a mistake for me; rather it was an injury that I'd love to make disappear if I could. I was not aware of how serious my back condition was at that point. If I knew and understood the state of my back, then I probably would not have been surfing in the first place. I loved body boarding and the water; it became a very natural thing for me to do, but with my already injured back, surfing was far more dangerous than I was aware of.

Later that year I fractured my back while body-boarding. Jeremy and I used to body-board a lot at Boomer Beach. We loved to get there when the sun was just coming up. At certain times of the year you could get an offshore wind and a nice barrelling shore break. We loved tube riding and busting airs. On this particular day we got there nice and early. It was a classic day with 'A' frames peeling from right to left and it was too good to miss.

As I paddled out over a wave, the lip peeled and the pressure of the shore break pushed my board against me and this flexed my back. I would normally have duck dived under the wave, but I felt I could make it over, but I didn't. There must have already been a bit of a weakness in my lower back because it broke real easy. Jumping off the jetty and landing in shallow water led to the break, I'm sure. Boomer Beach can actually be a very heavy wave. Despite my injury I surfed on that day, in typical Australian style. It's ingrained in our culture to keep going even after injuries. I had no idea at the time how serious the injury was. I don't think Jeremy had any idea either how serious the injury was; I did not complain enough.

The pain from this accident became worse over time. I never really understood it completely as I did not have it properly diagnosed. It seems stupid in hindsight, but my family were quite poor and they never really picked it up either. I have a high pain tolerance, which blocked me from getting it checked out. Unfortunately at nineteen years of age the fracture never healed. I cannot believe it, that I did not have the injury properly diagnosed until the age of 25. You think you are indestructible at nineteen and, even after the injury I just kept pressing on as long as I could.

There is no time for regret when you're a young man. It pushed me out of surfing a bit though. I surfed a lot less after the injury due to back pain. I should have stopped it completely if I was wise but my love for surfing kept me going. Injuries in sport kept pushing my focus back to music. The band would now remain my main focus in life due to an elimination of many other things around me.

Back pain was something I would have to learn to get used to for a while. It's my response that surprises me when I look back on things. I was training to be a PE teacher at University, yet my injury recovery program was non-existent. The fact that I kept moving and remained active did help. Some activities were damaging my back and some things were making it stronger; it took me years to work out what things strengthened it and what things weakened it. It was a trial by error rather than an educated recovery. I did not actually stop and fix things up until around 2003, I simply kept charging on.

"Happiness is hiding somewhere in your eyes. [Lessie Does, *Leaving the World Behind*] This was true for me, happiness was hiding in my eyes. I would have to learn how to block out pain and get on with life. Long

term pain does change your personality and social life. It can get you down from time to time. Life was not all happy after the injury. I was able to continue with music, but I'd have to learn how to deal with pain. I had to learn to live with it whether I liked it or not. I would find happiness in the music, but I was no longer in a state of joy. Life was much more difficult than this for me now.

If I did not have music then I'm not sure what else I would have done with my life. I don't think I would have been as productive after my injury. There was so much more to be done, so much more we wanted to do as a band. Lessie was gathering momentum at this point. The band gave us purpose and something to do. Back pain certainly affected my music a lot. It was harder to write songs and harder to perform. It was much harder to find happiness. I tried to keep going through it all. Lessie Does carried me more from here on in. Rather than being a proactive band member, I was now carried by the other members of the band.

Lessie Does never tried to copy the music of Seraphs Coal and Embodiment 12:14, but we certainly tried to match their intensity and live performances. We put a lot into our presentation. By this I mean that the band tried to make something happen on stage, something needed to be said or done, or put in motion. To start with we had nowhere near the same presence as the other lead groups. It's not like too many bands could match the intensity of Embodiment 12:14 and Seraphs Coal, but you could have a go!

There must have been a lot of kids watching these early Underground shows thinking the same thing: "I have got to get up there and give this band thing a go."

The trend had been set by these early groups. Christian original music was now in and punk was the driving force behind this. It was the ignition point where everything took off. The punk scene continued to grow in the late '90s, especially in our domain. It flourished and grew. Bands like Seraphs Coal, STR and Huckle Nut were emerging. They were all feeding off each other. Ska music also complimented the scene, but punk was at the epicentre of everything.

Imagine your first show makes the headlines of the newspaper! Years later I learnt that Seraphs Coal's first show was actually at the Blackwood Recreational Centre, south of Adelaide, in the foothills. It was out of

control from the start. The place was over-packed with young skaters. It was the kind of numbers you can only dream of for your first show. Only there were too many people in the Recreation Centre and the kids were getting very rowdy.

As it turned out, Andre's Renault 12 was overturned outside after the gig. The show was so big it made the local Messenger paper with stories about wild young youths running riot. Seraphs Coals' reputation as an awesome fast punk band was already well on the way after just one show. It was certainly growing anyway in the southern area of Adelaide. The high level of intensity of Seraphs' first appearance was an early indication of what they were about to bring to the table.

Seraphs Coal's first gig at the Underground was *Mosh against Cancer*. The gig was organised with the aim of raising funds to fight cancer. Steve Rowe from Mortification was unwell with the illness at the time. This was a huge thing; Steve was fundamental in getting the Underground up and going and now he was seriously unwell! The kids were moshing to fight for him. The venture was no longer simply a band venue, but now it was a place where social action could function. It's important to do all we can as a community and a world to fight for humans. We can raise money and support our friends going through a difficult time when we have a strong community formed. Shows like *Mosh against Cancer* strengthened the Underground as a venue but also as a place of action. Steve Rowe later recovered from cancer, although he has had to deal with ongoing related health issues.

Early shows at the Underground provided Seraphs Coal with a springboard to launch into the larger Adelaide scene. In one of their first shows with Embodiment 12:14 at the venue, Andre remembered Sam's amp stopping. So Sam just turned around and kicked the amp and the thing started working again. Not only did they have amp problems, but the whole stage was moving around.

There were no crowd barriers in those days and people would get up on the stage and grab the microphone. More and more people kept coming up on the stage; it was a growing tradition. Early shows were chaotic at times. These shows built a solid community fan base for the bands to spread their wings further into the state and national scene.

Although the place was in its infancy, the strength of the early gigs came

from the bands playing together. For example, you would have hardcore, punk and rock bands all playing at the same gig. It was not completely genre-specific in those days. Everyone loved what was happening at the Underground in those early years.

After just one show at the band venue, Seraphs Coal landed high level management. The band discussed how they dreamed of one day playing with MXPX towards the end of their career. It soon became a reality as MXPX toured Australia that year and they were given the support show at Flinders University. It was a very large show and a dream gig for the band to break into the scene. Very quickly on they were able to cement their position as Adelaide's favourite Christian punk band. Both MXPX and Seraphs were also well respected in the secular punk scene. Suddenly Seraphs were now playing with international acts. Management propelled Seraphs Coal to a high level very quickly.

A lot of bands did not earn very much in those days. To start with, many bands were doing gigs for free. Seraphs were practicing three times a week in the early years. They were totally living it out. At times however groups were definitely taken advantage of. There was a lot of generosity going around by the bands as the scene started out. One of the good things about the Underground was that they did pay the bands right from the beginning.

Seraphs Coal won their first Battle of the Bands competition and soon after recorded on a small digital recorder. They still had little or no idea about recording at that stage. Sam laid the guitar tracks down first and then Dan had to record the drums afterwards. This made it impossible to get the timing right. Some of the drum rolls had to speed up and then slow down. Nevertheless the band ran off three hundred demo tapes which, subsequently, were all sold in one night.

This band had something special about them and it's no wonder they won band competitions. When you watched them, they grabbed you by the ears and held your attention for the whole show. You could never be bored watching them; they would have had the Judge's concentration that's for sure. Seraphs shows were nonstop energy-filled action events.

Darren Thompson from Thinktank recorded Seraphs' second demo tape at SAEU studios. The band kept going and recorded all night and then, when they were finished, they placed the tape into the car that morning

and listened to the final product. The band described this as the best feeling ever. It was a live recording basically. Darren was well experienced already by this point. He continued to help Seraphs Coal progress a lot in their career. Darren Thompson had done a good job on the Stand demo.

The band won another Battle of the Bands with Globe Studios. That recording turned out to be a bit of a disaster. The guy had no idea how to record punk music – he was more into rock and roll. There were some good songs on the demo and the band played well. Dan Jones thought that this was the best the band ever played, but it did not work out with this one.

That's all part of the process with recording. Recording is a whole different ball game to playing live. It takes a lot of practice to develop this side of things. The band and the sound engineer have to work as one in the studio. Despite the recording side not working out, Dan felt that the band was playing better and better; it just didn't work out this time round.

While Seraphs Coal was developing their sound in the studio, another Christian punk band was in the making. STR were watching them and learning from the band. They served a long apprenticeship in the scene. Prior to getting involved in punk they spent some time observing bands. Nathan Humphris from STR went to the same church as Seraphs Coal. He followed them around for a while, watching shows and observing how they went about things.

There weren't too many punk bands around at that stage. If you could start a band then you were doing well. Visualizing punk music brought STR half way into the picture. Nathan had seen what needed to be done in order to live out Christian punk music. This apprenticeship taught him all he needed to know, but as yet STR had not formed in 1997. Nathan described the early scene in this way: "There were a lot of house parties and it was a lot less career-focused. It was less developed, but on the other hand things were more raw and natural. The scene was more like a rough diamond rather than any polished acts. All the same there were still a lot of very good bands around."

There were lots of bands about to grow out of the likes of Seraphs Coal and Thinktank, but that had not yet occurred. When Josh from STR first saw Seraphs Coal he was shocked! He thought these guys were really good. People were still questioning Christian punk rock and roll at that stage.

"Isn't that an oxymoron?" people asked. Is it possible for Christians

to do punk? Christian punk rock was being explored by the public for the first time in Australia. Observing Christian punk music for a period of time helped motivate STR and inspired them to get further into the scene. They would follow the path of Seraphs Coal and continue to develop skate punk.

Skateboarding was a big part of the Underground culture. Everyone was young and after shows Nathan from Hometime would skate around with Seraphs.

“It was a lot of fun,” he said.

Skate influences came out a lot in the music, clothes, and in the general culture of the bands. Skateboarding was one of the dominant forces driving the sound of the groups.

Hometime was another band emerging in the scene around 1997. Aaron shared with me what inspired him to get into band music. People were coming just for the music. It was real raw back then. Aaron was listening to '80s rock and roll before he found a Christian band called Stryper. He seemed to progress from there into punk rock and then into heavier and heavier music. When he first discovered Embodiment 12:14 he thought they were the craziest band on the planet!

“From then on, I wanted to start my own band,” he said.

I'm not sure how many bands started out because of Embodiment 12:14! Inspired to start a band, Aaron began writing songs. He had been writing love songs before he switched to writing some songs for his youth group. He commented on their early development: “We just wrote songs. We weren't really a band, then all of a sudden people started calling us a band. We didn't try to be a band, we just liked to play music and then all of a sudden we were.”

The band recorded their first demo in 1997.

Seraphs Coal was the first Christian punk rock band to fully emerge and dominate the scene. They were a band in the right place at the right time, doing the right thing. They would drag a whole heap of new bands with them like Hometime, STR, Hone and Thinktank. There were a lot of bands starting to get things going around this time. Lessie Does was simply one of the bands in the mix. By this stage the Underground was no longer an alternative music venue, just for hardcore and metal kids. The mainstream youth groups and churches were now beginning to become a lot more involved and supportive.

Christian punk had now arrived in a big way! There were suddenly a lot of Christian fans going around. So many kids caught the vibe of what was happening. They were coming to shows and getting into bands and getting into Christian punk rock music. People would wear the lifestyle on their sleeves literally! The 2 Bucks crew were famous for their band attire and fashion statements.

By 1997 Christian punk had established itself in Australia. It had taken us several years to be influenced by the larger US scene, but things were now starting to take off for us as well. By this stage kids were into both local bands and US Christian acts. It was a healthy sign for people to become aware of the planet's bigger musical picture.

I think it's important to stay close to God in both good and difficult times. It was vital for me not to linger in regret over my injuries as there was so much more to be done. Things were definitely not over. Christian punkers were driving things now! The Underground was pressing on with God! I was the kind of kid that needed all the help I could get even though I was in a band and playing at Christian shows, or perhaps because I was in a band. I was so influenced by people around me, it was vitally important that I had the Underground Christian scene in my life.

Pressing On

.....

Mistreated from a young age,
 Picture in his pocket and six pills a day,
 I knew it and he did to,
 I figured oh what could I do?
 Looking back this much is clear,
 I can't change a thing or make mistakes disappear,
 I feel it and until the end I'll be left oh wondering,
 Not over no time for regret,
 Not over so much more to be done,
 Not over and I'm pressing on,
 Got the message on the parade,
 Obviously somebody had something to say,
 You knew it all along and now it's time for pressing on.

ARTISTS *Jeremy Brown/Nathan Purdie* ■ SONG *Pressing On*
 BAND *Waybackwhen record: All these Times EP* © 2004

CHAPTER 7

A Growing Scene

.....

1998

*Hypocrisy is part of me, I refuse to see
my instability, I know I'm wrong,
I know I'm free but it's so contradictory.*

Dan Jones, *Hypocerase*
SERAPHS COAL

I FELT LIKE A HYPOCRITE AS A PERSON, for I was not a stable Christian at this point in my life. I was struggling to be any different from anyone else in the world. I did not feel like Daniel from the Bible, my childhood hero, nor was I as direct and passionate as other Underground punk and hardcore band members. I was not standing up enough for my God, other than I did confess to being a hypocrite.

Although I felt free through Christ, I felt it was not for me to judge anyone else. I was very much aware that I was a sinner. I felt like a hypocritical Christian, as one minute I would be up on a stage playing a Christian show and the next minute I would be involved in the pursuits of the world. It was a contradictory life that I was leading.

I was falling out of the Church all together at this time. I was somewhat of an orphan to the Church, meaning that I was lost and outside of regular Sunday meetings. I was no longer firmly placed in the community and

the family of God. Not that going to Church is everything, but this was simply an indication of where my faith was at.

You can survive as a Christian in the world, but for me it was a lot harder without the support of Christian friends constantly building me up and encouraging me.

Woke today another story,
visions are all but faded.

Antiskeptic, Nothing to Say

This was true for me in some ways as I was losing grip of my childhood dreams and visions.

The pull from my Uni friends was becoming stronger than my church life. I was influenced a lot by people at University rather than Christian friends. I had some good friends at Uni and a lot of them were very much classic Australians. The problem was more for me of a spiritual nature; as I was removing myself from God. I had my pastor questioning whether or not I was a Christian because I was simply not at services. It's bigger than you think – leaving the Church left me stranded and in difficult circumstances at times. I think my childhood faith was still there, although I had somewhat hardened my heart towards God. My faith was certainly not glowing and flowing out of my music.

“I don't want to get trapped by the pleasures of this world; there is only one place to fill the empty at the cross of Jesus Christ all the foolishness and things of this world will not take hold.” [**Seraphs Coal**, *OffTrack*]
Unfortunately, I was in a position where I was being trapped by the pleasures of the world rather than living a Christian life in 1998. I did not want to be trapped by the world, but I was.

I think I needed a Christian girlfriend to sort me out at this point, but I could not give up the things of the world and so I was pulled to social circles outside of the Church. There is a way that seems right to a man but in the end it leads to destruction. [**Seraphs Coal**, *Long Distance Call*]
The path I was on would lead me to a point of destruction both personally and spiritually. Band life was actually my strongest link and association with Christians for many years.

Despite the distance I had placed between myself and many Christians, Jesus remained with me, He never changed His position, and He never changed His love for me. “The more things change, the more

they stay the same, we shuffle the deck, but the cards remain the same, the hand still gets played. [Seraphs Coal, *Blood Red Under Blue Skies*] Jesus' love for me remained the same, no matter how things changed. Jesus love was constant. Although I was somewhat isolated He still worked through Lessie Does even when I was disconnected from other Christians.

The Underground music scene remained a lifeline to me during this time for obvious reasons. It was the movement that kept pulling our band to Christ. Lessie Does was in the slipstream of the scene. Without the other groups we may have simply been a secular band. Seraphs Coal was literally pulling us along at times. They were an inspiration to me personally as was the larger scene in general. Seraphs were our favourite band and they had a big influence on us. God was guiding Lessie Does by providing us with key influences.

Despite our love for Seraphs our official position was that we would play both world poetry and Christian music and this would have advantages and disadvantages for me. I think one of the disadvantages was that, like the band, I was a little confused about my faith and where I sat in the world. Lessie Does would have to work out exactly what our position was.

As I was not connected with many Christians, this made it harder for me to express my faith through music. I couldn't get my faith out on paper! I was on the edge of writing Christian music in 1998. I was so close. Inspired by US Christian bands, I was writing a song for Lessie Does. I was going to call the song *Sunday*. There was a line in the song, which read: "We're too late to follow the sun today; anyway we'll follow the Son today."

Meaning that the day may be over, but we can still follow Jesus today! I ended up changing the lyrics, though. I mixed up the word Sunday, and changed it to *Daynus*, which was just Sunday jumbled up. I also changed Son, to sun. I was so very close to expressing my faith and then I changed it.

I was definitely hiding my faith. I had some issues with Christian art. At this time the band did not have the full support of the Christian scene and we had not fully developed a Christian focus either. That's how close I came to writing a Christian song. I did it and then I changed it. It's sad that I could not express my faith at this point. I never wrote one single specifically Christian lyric after that point in the whole time I was in Lessie Does. It was all inside of me the whole time; however I had to learn how to get it out on paper!

Andrew Lang helped work and develop the song, but I never shared the initial meaning of the lyrics with him. Andrew helped shape the melody line and Daynus would go on to be one of our favourite songs for many years. Daynus was a school student that we knew, but it's weird because the song was never really about him, it was about me and Jesus, but then it got all mixed up and that's exactly what it was – *mixed up*. I was mixed up. On one hand I was a Christian, but on the other I struggled to actually live out my beliefs in the world.

I predominantly only listened to world rock music during this period of six years of my life away from the Church, that is except for one Seraphs Coal CD. I bought one copy of their debut EP *Don't Mind if I Don't* for my cousin, and one copy for myself around Christmas time, 1998. By that stage Seraphs were my favourite Christian band. As for many Christians, they had become the image of Christ for me. I saw Jesus in what they were doing. These Christian punkers were helping me get to heaven. This record was vitally important to me, but that was it. I did not buy a single Christian record after that until 2004.

If there was a record to define the movement at the Underground then I would choose *Don't Mind If I Don't* by Seraphs Coal. It was so raw and so punk. It has the most full-on Christian lyrics. It certainly does not leave you with any questions where these guys come from. It's my favourite recording and also Seraphs Coal's. The band found their style on the record. Darren Thompson recorded the EP at Sound House Studios on his new Christian label, Sureshot Records. Darren later changed his record company name to Strategy Records. He had sold a heap of gear to get the label going. This label helped to put the finishing touches on a classic record.

The Underground scene now had a state number one record and a new Christian label. *Don't Mind If I Don't* was raw skate punk, but I simply thought, it sounds like Seraphs Coal. I had never heard punk with this much energy before. The biggest and most important thing though was the reaction by people. There were a lot of Christians getting into this punk record. It went big in the scene, and stayed a classic for the remainder of the movement. Christians were lining up for this one at the record stores.

Lyrics from the scene defined who we were and what we stood for. I think a lot of Christians also found identity through the Underground music and the lyrics. This is who I am; this is an expression of my faith.

The best lyrics from the scene are somewhat inspirational, but it's not like we got it right the whole time. There are some words that I would love to personally change, however Jesus used what we did do for His glory and for the building of His kingdom. The words from the music drew a picture of Christ. The words gave us identity as followers of Jesus.

'One God,' track seven from the classic EP *Don't Mind If I Don't*, is an example of Seraphs Coal's passion for Jesus. Seraphs Coal reveal that they serve One God! "One God, don't need no crystal balls, no idols on my walls, no luck chain around my neck, my star signs I don't have to check, wretched are they in dead things." Seraphs were a band that served Jesus and God as their Lord and Saviour. They followed 'One God'! It's easy to put things before God, the world presents many idols and Seraphs made it known where they stood, they stood firmly with God. They worshipped 'One God.'

If people "are capable of acquiring enough knowledge to investigate the world, how have they been so slow to find its master?" Seraphs pose a good question, in their song, 'One God.' If people can fully investigate the world, then why do people not investigate God more? So many things are put before God. Some people place witchcraft and dark arts before God. They have so much knowledge; so why can't they investigate God and find that He is the true Lord of this earth and worthy of worship before all things? Seraphs Coal encourage us to worship 'One God'!

This one Seraphs Coal record was all I would ever have from the Underground scene. The bands would release a large amount of records but I never purchased another album. I was basically doing everything blind with Lessie. I was in the scene fully, playing Christian shows and inviting kids to get into it, yet at the same time I was on the outer.

Jeremy Owen and Andrew Lang were the leaders in Christian poetry for Lessie Does. They were feeding my soul with Christian music. Their continued efforts have helped me along the way. It's interesting because now I'm at worship and I'm looking back on this time. Christian friends such as Jeremy, Andrew and Dale Gosden have helped encourage me to write Christian music. Most importantly God has directed me to praise Him through the scriptures.

Some of the world's music is truly awesome. However Satan is at work through some bands, some musicians don't know what they are even

doing, but others are fully aware of what they are playing around with. You only have to read the lyrics to understand what I'm talking about. You do have to be careful with what you're listening to. You need to know where a band is coming from. Lyrics are far more important than you realise at the age of 19.

Shows became more frequent as the Underground grew in popularity. There were definitely some success stories that were coming out of the organization and management became very excited about what they were seeing and doing. The bands helped to fuel the Underground manager's passion for original Christian music. You had to have a real servant's heart to continue on as shows progressed to be every week. Music as a ministry? That it had become! The venue was booked out for two to three months in advance, with regular crowds between 150 and 200 people. It was a regular event now by 1998.

The main problem with the residence was that it was a small venue. The scene became real big all of a sudden in 1998. A lot of bands outgrew the complex. They were forced to leave and move on as, according to management the venue only holds around 250 people at its absolute legal limit. The small venue was not big enough for the leading bands of the time.

The Underground became a springboard for many bands to get out into the state and national scene. When experienced bands moved on to bigger venues this provided new Christian bands with more available gigs. It gave new bands a chance to grow and move through the ranks a bit so to speak, in the shelter of a Christian venue. It seemed for a while that this system provided a steady flow and progression. It was all working very well; although it was a shame that several of the larger bands never returned to the Underground that much.

Lessie Does was guilty ourselves of moving out into the secular scene and not returning to the venue, although we often played with Christian bands at larger secular venues. In hindsight it would have been nice to do a few more gigs at the home of Christian original music. I would have liked to give back more to the scene and support up and coming bands like our friends Waybackwhen.

The place was developing so much that it was gaining secular recognition. You found these Christian bands now lining up in larger venues across the state. The bands were really beginning to work with each other

in the secular scene as well now by 1998-99. This was something that we did do well. We kept up relationships by playing gigs with each other in the wider music world. I think this was actually what made things unique and special for us.

Advertising became a big thing at the Underground. As bands grew out of the establishment it was vitally important that the venue worked in with larger Christian festivals over the next few years. Harold festivals, Freedom parties and *Youth Alive* nights became key calendar events in the year and they were heavily promoted. In fact the Underground had taken off so much that a lot of venues around the city used to put up posters in order to advertise their own gigs. It really did become a community music hub for not only Christian music but secular bands too. Advertising at the Underground had become an important part of the state and national scene.

STR was another band emerging out of the Underground in 1998. Josh and Nathan from STR found that punk grabbed them; they felt it was very real. They liked the political and social side of it. They found that punk music was actually a relief from the world at the time. They enjoyed the music and found it fun. Josh had built up some band experience, as he had previously played for a Christian band called Huckle Nut before joining STR.

STR was one of those bands that came into the Underground scene with a fair idea of what they were doing. It's not like they had no idea, they were a very young band but all the same they had things going on very early in the piece. I would describe STR as a street smart band, meaning that they knew all about Christian punk and they knew exactly what they were setting out to do! Seraphs Coal had helped to provide them with a blue print plan.

T-Shirts were a new and exciting development for the Underground. STR released a T-Shirt with a large mow-hawk man on it. It was so punk! The red and white punk T-Shirt quickly became one of the most popular and sought after band T-Shirts in Adelaide. After witnessing the response to this T-Shirt, Josh felt excited by the fact that STR could do things as a real band. Josh believed that they should get their act together now and start doing things much more full on. The T-Shirts were a very big kick start for the band. It gave them a solid break onto the Underground scene and the rest is history for STR!

Some bands take a while for the mix to get just right. STR went through a few different bass players before the line up was fixed. Their first ever show was with Seraphs Coal. It was a Youth Group show. There were only about forty people there, but it was an indication of growth in the scene. Shows were not only happening at the Weymouth city street residence, but the scene was now starting to pick up in the churches as well. STR started to gig and once they finally got things going it became a growing snowball for the band, meaning that they just did not stop gigging!

STR needed Seraphs, but Seraphs actually needed STR just as much! It was very important that Seraphs had growing support. They were a strong band, but they desperately needed other Christian punk bands to play with them. It's very hard to do lots of shows in the end by yourself. Generating a whole wave of Christian punk bands was good medicine for the scene, locally and nationally. STR played a big role in supporting Seraphs at this stage of the movement. Combined together the community now had a quality punk show.

STR's first gig at the Underground was with Sandal Wood and Mustard Seed. It was impressive to see everyone rock up with these punk T-Shirts on. This was the start of a massive year of gigging. In their first year STR performed around sixty shows, which is more than one a week. They played at a lot of youth centres, and were stoked to get some supports at the Uni Bars, which by the way is not usual for bands starting out; you normally have to wait your turn. I remember it took Lessie quite a few years before we played supports. I think this really shows how switched on STR were.

They were a band that everyone knew exactly what they were on about. You knew when you saw STR you were in punk land! The Weymouth establishment however was their regular base.

"It was heaps handy to have this place as a starting point," said Josh from STR. The Underground provided many bands with a place to start out. STR went on to do many shows at the Underground.

I'm not quite sure when STR recorded their first demo; some bands have it going on from the start though! A lot of people loved early STR. This could be described as young and innocent punk rock. The band would go as hard and as fast as they could without really caring about breaking through or anything like that; they just wanted to be as punk rock as they could be. Josh started the band when he was only fifteen, so STR were

always one of the youngest bands in the scene and for this reason they took their time in the recording department.

There was actually a lot of anticipation for a CD release. They definitely had everyone waiting with interest for years. The first demo was a good taste of what was to come. The lyrics were pretty blatant to start with as STR expressed strong beliefs in Jesus. It was Christian punk, straight, and to the point.

Lessie was a little bit more on the outer of the scene compared to STR, but we were also another improving band at this stage. Lessie Does returned to the Christian youth band competition in 1998 with a win. Our new song, 'Fairy Floss', would grab the judge's attention. By this time the band had gelled and we were a lot tighter than in 1997. We were doing lots of gigs at that stage. Even that night we were rushing off to do another show after the competition. We had done a lot of learning as a band in just one year.

Earlier in 1997 Lessie Does won another competition with a record company called Love Records. That year Lessie Does went into Love Records to lay down our first EP. I still remember the producer Nick Love sipping some strong short blacks to get himself fired up for the day. I was curious just what he was drinking. I had never seen coffee like this before. He saw that I was curious and he offered me a try. A double short black was a real life experience. It certainly punks you, and Lessie Does was about to punk the studio!

Jeremy got to play on a studio drum kit which was a big deal at the time for us and we stood around in this very tiny room whacking down all five songs in less than a day. We then mixed the record in one session soon after. We were a pretty tight band at that stage. Although we were under a lot of time pressure, we came out with an amazing product considering all things. Although we had produced our first CD by 1998 it was not yet released and therefore we were still allowed to enter the Christian youth band competition. This win helped the band to gain excellent momentum before our first CD release. It was perfect timing.

Lessie Does was on the up. Our first record did the job of establishing the band. It certainly got our name out there in the band community and it helped us get a lot more gigs. We no longer had to chase shows anymore; we were now getting offers regularly. Lessie Does was starting

to pull good crowds. We really noticed the growth in the Christian band scene at the time.

Music provided us with a way to communicate to the world. A lot of what we did was just fun. The first Lessie Does EP was titled *Ride the Yellow Yota*, and it was on Love Records. The name of the CD derived from Jeremy's yellow Toyota Corolla. We used to call it the Yellow Yota for some reason; I think we shortened the word Toyota, which is a very Australian thing to do. On my body-board I had drawn "ride the Yellow Yota" with markers on the slick side of the board. We would always journey down to the surf in Jeremy's Yota! It was just a fun title for the CD in the end. We surfed and played music in those days. This CD title was simply a way to express what we were doing. Having fun was at the core of Lessie Does.

We desperately needed to record our Christian material. All five songs were quite solid, but it was 'Fairy Floss' that got us onto Christian and national radio and established the band in the Underground scene.

Lessie Does played several shows at the Underground, but it was not our main stay. We were in the Christian scene at this point, but our main focus was still on the secular music world. The album was launched in the pubs of Adelaide. We were taking this blatant Christian message to the world. I'm not sure if the average person in the pub knew what Lessie Does was on about, but the Christian community was on to us.

We did play a few Underground shows, but we never actually officially launched *Ride the Yellow Yota* in the Christian scene. We had a strong following in several Christian communities but we were not yet fully exposed, as were the likes of Seraphs Coal and Embodiment 12:14. Darren Thompson, recording engineer and Thinktank lead singer responded well to our first EP. Darren felt that national radio could have really picked up on our single 'Fairy Floss'.

For its time around 1998 it was a good quality recording. Digital records were very much still being developed at this point. We did receive some national radio play but not full heavy rotations, which are often required to get bands going. Still it was pleasing and helpful at the time to further establish relationships with Underground bands such as Thinktank. This helped Lessie Does to become more entrenched in the Christian scene, yet we still had some ground to cover.

That year Andrew Lang won a Coke competition which, in turn, helped us to get a gig on the Whitsunday Islands. The Whitsunday Islands are a very beautiful holiday destination, just off the Queensland coast. In 1998 I was to have my first plane flight. The boys were all watching my face as the plane took off. It was a rush to be heading up and away with the band. The feeling when the jets first kick in is something special.

Lessie Does played a show on Daydream Island. On our day off we sailed around the islands, surfing behind a big catamaran. The water was really warm and we went for a snorkel afterwards. The show was very memorable and my first ever plane flight with the band is something that also stays with me. Lessie was opening up my world and in fact the Christian band scene in Australia was growing simultaneously at this time.

Darren Thompson from Thinktank helped to draw the Christian music scene together by establishing a Christian label. The Seraphs Coal release, *Don't Mind If I Don't* was an excellent way to get the label moving forward. In 1998 Darren pulled together a compilation record called *Sureshot sampler*. On this record Darren gathered ten Underground bands together. It goes down as an important release for the scene. This was the first time the bands would come together in such a way. Darren Thompson produced the record and Tim Rohrlach engineered it.

Embodiment 12:14 were also picked up by Sureshot Records in 1998 and given a real boost as was Jemima, Thinktank, Dewey Del, Seraphs Coal, Hone, Atlantis, Soopentoast, Pointblank and Sub. Darren Thompson sold some gear to raise some funds for the project. This really helped the growth of the scene at the time. The *Sureshot sampler* did a lot to unify the whole band community.

Our absence on the sampler as a band was an indication of where Lessie sat in the scene at the time. We were on the outer of the Christian community. Some bands did not fully know how to take us, as we were not 100% Christian-focused. I think our world poetry was questioned by some Christian artists. It was not until the festivals and CD launches that Lessie would be included further in the scene. I think it took time for people to understand our role as a band and what we were on about.

By 1998 the Underground scene was growing quicker than ever before. By this time there were enough key bands in the community to foster real

growth. There was no longer a handful of bands, now there were many groups present. The Underground scene was developing. It was not simply just a hardcore or Christian punk movement anymore; there was a full array of groups emerging with lots of different styles coming to the foreground. It was a growing scene. It was really cool.

Hypocerase

.....

Hypocrisy is a part of me
I refuse to see my instability
I know I'm wrong
I know I'm free
But it's so contradictory
There's a pebble in every shoe
A stumbling block unseen to men
It's one of Satan's little games
To defile and make unclean
Just like the graves unseen
Walked over unbeknownst
We build the tombs of the prophets
And burn the synagogues
Hypocerase it's time to erase
No righteousness of us
All righteousness in Him
He cleanses us completely
From guilt and shame and sin
So many inconsistencies
I'll try and hide them from you
And from myself
I'm just a hypocrite

ARTIST *Seraphs Coal* ■ SONG *Hypocerase*
BAND *Seraphs Coal* ■ RECORD *Don't Mind if I Don't, EP* © 1998

CHAPTER 8

Place of Harmony

.....

1999

*I wish I was someone who knew
who they were, I'd write to you,
but I don't know what to say,
dear friend, hope you understand,
I am older now, not too late to change.*

Matthew Baker, *Not too late to change*
LESSIE DOES

IN 1999 THERE WAS RENEWED HOPE for all Christian artists in Australia. Rhubarb broke onto the national music scene with a hit song called 'Exerciser'. Rhubarb originated out of Brisbane. That year the band made it onto Triple J's hottest 100. In fact they made it to the top 20! The very short song, Exerciser, received a lot of air play. Their debut album sold over 15,000 records. Rhubarb was voted best album of the year at the fourteenth annual Sunnie Awards in 1999. They also won best new band. I remember being excited by Rhubarb. Finally we had a Christian band on Triple J. It really did inspire me to see where we could take things in the future with Lessie Does.

I managed to watch Rhubarb live when they finally came to Adelaide.

There were a lot of local Christian artists checking them out that night. I was inspired by their pop sensibility, meaning that the band really understood how to write a catchy tune. Rhubarb fully understood the Triple J game. The band went on to record three albums on Toupee Records and they toured nationally. I think discovering a Christian band that had reached this level made me realise that our dream was possible. We could make it, we could do this. I'm sure that Lessie was not the only band to think this either. Triple J seemed the only way in Australia at the time to break onto the national scene. So OK, it had been done, so why can't we do this? I'm sure this was the line of thinking for many of the Underground bands in South Australia. It was an exciting feeling worth holding onto.

At the same time as Rhubarb bust onto the scene in a dynamic way, I was simply a young man searching for identity in 1999. Upon reflection it is easy to see why I was looking to find more direction. I was an artist not in relationship with God and I was unable to write Christ-focused music. I was lost in the world except for the fact that I had good friends and I had a good band. Lessie Does helped to provide me with direction and identity, but as an individual I was not completely solid. I was easily influenced by others around me. I wished I was someone who knew who they were.

I always loved country people. Andrew Lang was definitely not the only country boy that I got on well with back in my school days. Andrew seemed assured and confident of who he was as a person. Country people were always relaxed and I found they spoke more directly to me. I also found that country tours bonded our band together.

One of my favourite gigs with Lessie Does was actually a country show. Lessie was warmly welcomed into the town. We had run out of CDs at that point as we had sold out of our first EP, so we ran off a bunch of tapes for the kids. They all got way into the band and we sold a whole heap of tapes that night. I learnt that evening how much country kids get into music. They have less bands coming through, so when they do get one, they all go off for you. The district rolled up that night and lots of people came from nearby towns around the area to catch our band. It was a memorable show.

Country kids and rock and roll is a part of Australia's history now. A love of bands is definitely not just a city thing. Country Australians love their bands. It's very much a part of our national culture. Bands provide important and much needed entertainment. Country shows are vital for

the national scene in Australia.

By mid 1999 Lessie Does continued to gain good momentum. Andrew was always a good business man and he worked hard for our band to receive a \$6000 dollar grant from Arts SA. We were successful after a lengthy application process. This grant was a Government initiative to promote and foster original music. The band had also secured a solid sponsorship deal with a local surf company JR's, a Christian bookstore and several other minor sponsors also supported Lessie Does. Financial support further propelled the band forward.

Sponsorship deals with companies allowed us to progress and produce our next EP. We received mixed vibes from bands for going down this commercial path, but we were an independent band trying to scrape some cash together to record a quality product. I don't regret the sponsorship side of things at all. It's no different from athletes being sponsored.

With greater financial support now behind Lessie, the band's second EP was released on October 30 at the Adelaide Uni Bar. It was a show for all ages. Seraphs Coal and secular band Yakspit supported us. It was good to connect with Seraphs again at this moment and it was also important to maintain our secular links. The show was sold out early. The venue held 400 people and we sold 200 CDs. It was a real breakthrough show for us.

Andrew Lang said later that he did not go out of his way to get into the Christian scene with Seraphs; rather it just happened to evolve at the same time as our band Lessie Does started out. There were a lot of Christian bands playing gigs in Adelaide at that time. As it turned out our favourite bands were also Christian bands. Seraphs Coal, STR and Thinktank were actually leaders in their specific genres.

"We always enjoyed sticking around and watching them after our show," Andrew said. "The Christian scene was a very natural part of our band life. It's not like we forced it or anything, it just happened to be there, and I just happened to be into it. I guess that's God's greater plan, isn't it?"

I'm sure that the Place of Harmony CD launch was part of God's plan for the band and for the community.

"Help me to be the man that your plan has in store for me. [**Hometime, Make This Life Count**] God was helping me to focus on heaven during this time in my life. He had a plan for me to share a dream of heaven with others even at this point in time. Our second CD was called Place of Harmony;

this title intentionally made a strong reference towards heaven. I had lost sight of my childhood dream, but God was placing it in front of me again in a different and unique way.

Andrew Lang wrote *Place of Harmony*. Lyrically speaking it was the stand-out song on the CD and became the concept behind the whole record. I believe God really blessed the band for following Him and singing about heaven to the world. This EP would become the band's most successful record not only from a sales point of view, but also from a message point of view as well. I don't think this was simply by chance either.

Our second CD contained stronger Christian lyrics. It was obvious from our message that the Underground movement was having an impact on our band. This CD launch with Seraphs helped Lessie to line up more with the Christian scene. Rather than be on the outer it was important for us to be embellished fully in the Underground community. The growth of the Christian music world in Australia was very evident to me that night. We no longer had a small following; Lessie Does now had our own solid support network.

Place of Harmony was well supported by the media. MORE FOR LESSIE and LESSIE DOES COUNTS THE CASH were the headlines. The media was always quick to jump on the sponsorship story. I am genuinely proud though of the Australian government and our media for supporting original artists. It really helped our band to flourish in the late '90s. It's one thing we are doing well in the music industry.

We were often described by the press as power pop punkers with melodic harmonies. Lessie enjoyed a few good rock songs in the mix as well. At times this would disappoint the pure punker, but then some people loved the variety. I think you're always going to be put in some kind of box by the press; this didn't bother me at all because people have to connect with you somehow. You need to wear some tag for people to be able to relate to you and understand what you're on about.

Not everyone connected with our variety, but everyone could connect with our harmonies; that was definitely the band's trade mark. There weren't too many bands going around doing three-part harmonies, at least in Adelaide anyway. A lot of what Lessie was doing with music was just plain good old fun. The fun side of the band often appeared in the media as well.

I dyed my hair peroxide blonde and the papers seemed to use this

photo over and over again. I hated the photo but that's rock and roll – you can't control everything. The rock and roll world is definitely not under control all the time! It's a bit of fun between band members when you get a bad photo in the press. We had some shockers too. On one hand, we were actually trying to have cool photos in the press and on the other hand you have to laugh a bit at yourself for those photos that end up in the paper.

Place of Harmony debuted at No. 2 in the state music charts, before later reaching Number 1 and hanging around in the charts for quite some time. The CD continued to do well and was also well received by the industry. That year Lessie Does was nominated for best unsigned act by the Music Industry Critics Association and by SAMIA. These bodies were the governing forces watching over the state's music. It was nice to be recognized by them for what we were doing. It was always a buzz to find Lessie regularly in the SAMIA music charts, at least for quite a while.

The band followed up the release with another launch night on November 13, 1999. This time we played with Thinktank and a secular band called Alien Dave at the Holdfast Hotel. We targeted more a rock crowd with this show rather than a punk vibe. Again it was good to have the balance of playing with Christian bands and yet also connecting with the secular music world. The Holdfast Hotel was becoming a regular stomping ground for the band. It was probably our home base at the time.

It was definitely one of the strengths of the Underground movement that all the bands also played in the secular community. We were not isolated in our own little world. The Underground scene was well connected to the bigger picture. The trick was to be in the world, but not of the world. Not an easy balance to always achieve.

Although this challenge of being a Christian in the world was not an easy thing for me to do personally, it was really the norm for these Underground bands. Thinktank and Edison were two leading groups in the scene that also played in the world regularly. These bands were at the centre of the Underground community in many ways.

It was very much a journey for the band members of Edison to come together. It's interesting what gets us started, and what inspires us to go down the band track. Rachel and Matt Ho from Edison started off by getting into music simply by listening to it. Rachel was into pop music as a young girl before later getting into rock music when she met Matt Ho. From there

on the band fell into the music scene; their first group was called Hone.

Hone was jamming for awhile on practice amps before they were asked to play at a government youth music show, called *Off the Couch*. After several line up changes their first band was formed and they started to gig around Adelaide. Together they had progressed from listening to music to now playing regular shows.

Hone was doing some good things in 1999 and in that year they released a creative EP. The band added a lot to the community as they had a real variety of different rock influences. Hone did not sway to the main theme of the Underground. Hone never experimented with punk that much despite its over whelming popularity at the time, although elements of punk may have snuck in. Rather they explored very creative song writing methods. The band did not walk down the road of commercial music at all.

Rachel and Matt Ho enjoyed the artistic approach of Hone, but at the same time they were looking to create a new sound and a totally new image. They decided it was best to form a new band and create a fresh start. The finish of Hone was simply the beginning for Matt Ho and Rachel's new band Edison. Edison would later grow into one of the most important bands in the scene. Edison played a vital support role for Thinktank early on and further down the track they would grow into one of the leading Christian bands themselves.

In 1999 Thinktank released their first EP, which was titled *Of Childhood Kings*. It was a solid CD and an important one for the scene because it helped to further establish what Underground bands were on about lyrically speaking. Darren Thompson self-produced the record. He already had quite a lot of experience at this point going into his music. The EP was also again done at Soundhouse Studios. Thinktank put the EP out on Strategy Records, which was Darren Thompson's own label. By this stage the label was becoming more and more recognised by the industry and the band community. *Of Childhood Kings* was Thinktank's debut release to the world.

Darren Thompson, the lead singer of Thinktank, already had years of experience with a previous band called Rash. Rash were one of the leading bands in South Australia and were also supported by Triple J. I remember catching Rash at a Triple J fundraising gig. Despite the good progress the band was making, Darren left Rash to pursue Christian music. Darren was now leading his own band on to do some really good things. I always felt

Thinktank had quite an original style at the time. Darren was a hard worker. He was prepared to work at everything he did. This meant that Thinktank was always a band on the improve. They constantly seemed to be refining songs, developing their sounds and generating a great live performance.

Thinktank were perhaps at the heart of the scene. If Seraphs Coal ignited things with Embodiment 12:14 then I would call Thinktank the industry band. For me Darren was very much at the core of the Christian music industry. He was the lead producer and he was soon to be an engineer as well. He had the main Underground label going and Darren was always at so many scene shows. He was everywhere. He was an inspirational character to me and to the other Christian bands! The whole band really typified what Underground musicians were on about.

Darren was very genuine and really passionate about what he did. Thinktank fitted in so well with other bands like Edison and Seraphs Coal. They could cross over between punk and rock bands very easily which helped them to get a lot of support shows with national and international bands. Thinktank were well loved by the larger music industry.

Bands like Edison, Thinktank and Lessie were making an impact on the wider music world. Later that year Lessie Does entered another band competition. We progressed through to the final. We were a popular band at that stage. Lessie Does won the People's Choice Award at the Triple M Home Grown Battle of Rock in November 1999. The *Place of Harmony* EP was receiving good support from both the media and the general public.

That was the first time the band played on a main stage arena. We had so many people that night. The band had a loyal following and we had enough numbers to carry us over the line. It was one of the biggest competitions in the state at the time, so it was great to make the final. We were disappointed not to win the outright recording prize, a Warner Bros. record deal, but that's how it is sometimes; it just depends on what style of music the record company is after.

In December 1999 Lessie Does recorded by request *Hark the Harold Angels Sing*, at one of the biggest radio stations in Adelaide, Triple M. We practiced the song up big time. We had made a punk version of the carol with lots of three-part harmonies to give it the Lessie Does trademark stamp on things. We then came in and recorded it in just a few hours. Still to this day I think it's one of the best things we ever did as a band! I

remember Andrew Lang coming in and laying down an amazing solo once we had recorded the bed tracks. It makes sense for Christian bands to do some carols; we should have done more of this really, but anyway that's what did happen. The Triple M radio station played the song regularly and national youth radio, Triple J and Life FM also picked it up.

I had graduated as a PE Teacher with an Outdoor Education major that year. I had a job lined up to go to out in the northern suburbs of Adelaide. The summer of 1999 was to be my last as a University student. Things were about to change for me from Uni life to work. I was becoming a teacher and a rocker, a somewhat paradoxically strange mix, but not uncommon in the Christian Underground scene, and I wouldn't be the last either.

Although I had the whole summer of 1999-2000 set aside for music, the other band members did not have the same free time as I did. We all were in relationships and the other boys had part-time jobs. It was a frustrating time for me. We were making good progress but at the same time we were not quite there yet either. We did not have all of the right structures in place to take the band further. We struggled to spend time on song writing that summer. I remember being frustrated at not being able to spend enough time down at Andrew's beach house as a band. Unfortunately while I was on holidays, the other boys were busy with their part-time retail jobs.

We no longer could escape for long holidays together, due to work commitments. We did manage to get together from time to time for surfing and skateboarding adventures. On the odd occasion Lessie Does would get into some downhill skateboarding. For us this meant the art of lying down on a skateboard and cruising down a hill as fast as we could go.

We used to do a train, which is where we would all line up and head down together. Or we would chase each other down the hill. I still have a few scars from these downhill adventures. When you had a crash it would always be a big one. It was a fair workout walking up the hill again and again. We were pretty close as a band in those days; we did a fair few things together. We would surf and do some downhill skating and play music and then head out with each other. Downhill skateboarding was a big rush for us. I was never that brilliant at it, but I enjoyed it all the same. Jeremy on the other hand was a lot more connected and into skateboarding than I was.

Music and culture are way connected. Skateboarding and music go together well. They feed off each other. Lessie Does also would feed off

youth culture. You became a part of it without even knowing it. Downhill skateboarding was part of the band's lifestyle from time to time. Skateboarding would have a big influence on many of the Underground bands. The *Don't Mind If I Don't* record by Seraphs Coal was a classic skate punk record and it would not be the last to come out of from the Christian community.

I had found culture and I had found music, but my Christian identity was somewhat confused. At least I had come to the point of writing about it. I carried with me feelings of being hypocritical, but now I hoped for change. I was confident it was not too late for things to change for me spiritually. I'm quite stubborn though; it would take me an awful lot before I would turn my life around to follow Jesus and be baptised. In the meantime God was going to use Lessie for His plans and purpose; even if I was a lost Christian artist, God found a way to communicate to me through a song about a place of peace.

Andrew was singing about it and Lessie Does was rocking out to it, *Place of Harmony* was a song of certainty for Christians. As a child I had a dream and now the band was sharing God's message with the world. It was good to connect with this beautiful topic of eternity again, not that I fully captured the importance of this song for years to come. I think God was really encouraging others and me to follow Him. Yahweh was sharing another insight and yet another invitation to journey to heaven with Jesus, through a rock song called Place of Harmony.

Not too late to change

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I wish I was someone who knew who they were,
 I'd write to you but I don't know what to say,
 But I don't know,
 I don't know what to say,
 Dear friend,
 Hope you understand,
 I am older now,
 Not too late to change,
 I wish I was understood,
 Under weighed,
 Sometimes I cry,
 Sometimes I wish I could cry.

CHAPTER 9

Salvation Missions

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2000

*And now I understand
just what it means
to give up everything
for what you believe.*

Dan Jones, *Thirteen*
SERAPHS COAL

LESSIE DOES WAS INVITED BY TRIPLE J to play *Live at the Wireless*. This was a tremendous opportunity for the band to gain massive exposure. It was a huge buzz to pull up to the ABC building and record our music. This was a real test for Lessie to see if we could play live music for radio under time pressure.

The band pulled off a solid performance. It was a real life experience and something that Australian bands love to do. There has been some absolute classic Triple J *Live at the Wireless* performances. At the time it was a vitally important way for the station to show off new bands and touring bands, plus it also gave established acts a chance to play their new albums.

Lessie Does was keen to make an impression and this was definitely a good step for the band to take. In many ways nothing could be more emblematic for a band than to play *Live at the Wireless*; this meant the band had become part of the national Australia music world thanks to Triple J.

Alright, so we were in the world and also playing some Christian music, but where was I personally at and how dedicated was I to my faith?

Well I don't think I personally knew what it meant to give up everything for what I believed in the Year 2000. I was following along with everything that was going on in Adelaide and in the Christian music world. I just happened to be in a punk band that played Christian songs, yet I was personally struggling to live out my faith. I would like to think that if things came to a point, then I would have been more than prepared to give up everything for Jesus. At the end of the day, the gospel is covered by the blood of Jesus and people do die to share the message of salvation. People do give up everything for what they believe, I have learnt this now.

I had a good job as a PE teacher and a good band and good friends. However, I was not awake to the sacrifices that people were making for our band to share the message of Jesus. I thought I had things easy in Australia; but I was blind to all the spiritual battles going on around me. People make huge sacrifices to share the love of Jesus even in a country like Australia.

The whole production side of our music slowed down quite a lot at this point. This did give us several advantages, it allowed us to focus on pushing the *Place of Harmony* EP and we further developed our live shows. The band was pushing on to reach new levels. Our stage performances were improving greatly and we were developing a lot more flow in our sets, which resulted in some really good gigs. The beginning of this year saw Lessie Does picking up quite a few national and international support shows.

Uni and band life work really well, but band and work did not always mix. Getting up at 6.30am for work is just not rock and roll. The band was at an in between stage. We had made good progress as an independent band, but we had not yet signed a major record deal or anything like that. So we were floating around. We did not have the structures in place to warrant going full time, although in saying this I often wonder what could have been if we had all decided to go full time. Life was about to change a lot for me; I was going from a University student to a first year teacher who played a lot of rock shows.

I started teaching at the age of 21, soon to be 22. My first year of teaching was definitely my toughest year. I had a difficult home group. I had some great kids but I also had some really full-on demanding ones. I don't think some of them would have survived even one year at the school,

but I was very tolerant. In the second year several of these students were expelled by other staff members which I found hard, but that's reality. Sometimes, kids will be kids. I heard later on that these students had completely changed and that they had grown up a lot.

Practicing twice a week with Lessie, doing shows and trying to teach was very demanding for me. I was a PE teacher which meant hardly any marking, but it was physical work and I was always tired. Upon reflection I should have done one or the other – teaching or rock and roll. Doing both made it hard to give my best to both worlds, but it was an exciting time for me nevertheless. I really enjoyed the challenge of it all.

One minute I was teaching and the next I was doing a show with Underground bands. The venue had a no-shirts-off policy for the bands, but it became almost a tradition for the drummers to take off their shirts. Dan Jones would take his shirt off before the show. I think he may have got the whole thing rolling. It seemed to become the norm in the end, maybe because it was really hot playing at the complex under lights.

I do remember that the Underground was hot! The lights were never that far away from you on the small stage, so you felt like you were cooking. It's no wonder that Dan Jones started a shirt's off tradition. It was a drummer thing for all the bands. The punk drummers would be working flat out under lights that were only centimetres away from them, so it was shirts off! Darren Thompson from Thinktank tried to encourage Dan Jones to keep his shirt on for the kids, but he never had much luck.

Christian gigs were not simply confined to the Underground. By the year 2000 Christian shows were popping up everywhere; there were lots of youth group gigs going around as well. Some shows stick with you forever. There was this Clovercrest Youth Group show out north of Adelaide that will remain highly memorable for Sam from Seraphs Coal. The sound guy was trying to shut the show down as things were getting out of control. He came up and took the microphones, but Dan kept on playing and the kids kept on singing. In the end the sound guy was trying to fight Sam.

"This was not the only time we ran into this guy," Dan said. "He did it about three or four times to us."

He kept on shutting our shows down. These gigs could still get really intense. The kids were famous for getting into the music, and Youth Group shows were no exception.

In the year 2000 Seraphs Coal released the *Operation Saves the Humans* EP. I feel that this EP by Seraphs played a very important role in the scene. It was a massive shout out to the world. The band developed their style and sound further; they had progressed to become a lot more in line with pop punk. They presented the planet with a strong social justice message. The world needs to be saved; we are in trouble; we have environment, social issues, sin and salvation needs. Not only that though, the band pointed out that people give up everything for Jesus and everything for this message of Christ.

Operation Saves the Humans put the issues out there in the open. Salvation is something that the world finds hard. It was important to put Jesus' message into a social context that people could relate to at the time. We can see the problems of the planet; we can see that people need to be saved from difficult situations. Please God, save the humans! We need to be saved through Jesus.

Seraphs were a band able to express the need for salvation. This EP saw the band's biggest growth. There were a whole stack of Underground bands supporting the CD launch that night. It was good to come together again in this way and project the band further. They were a group that always generated a lot of hype. People talk about Seraphs Coal, they interest everyone that ever hears their music or hears their story. This CD launch was no different; everyone was talking about the band and about their message.

That night Lessie Does supported Seraphs. The show had already sold out and it was packed out early. The fans were well into the show already. Seraphs crammed a big line up on that night so there was not a lot of changeover time in between bands. I remember we decided to play with masks on for something fun and different. Away we went, we were on extremely quickly. I wasn't sure if I was playing really badly or what was going on. It took me the whole first song to realise that it was the tuning on my guitar. I kept blaming the masks, but I had run out of time to get my tuning right. After that I remember the gig went off well! We had a big following getting right into the music. A lot of Lessie fans were way into Seraphs – there was always good crossover between these Underground bands. The crowd was amazing that night. It was a sell out show by 7.30pm. They would have had to turn away a lot of people that night. I'm not sure just how many, but it was a lot!

I remember thinking the *Save the Humans* CD cover was incredibly cool. It took me years, however, to realise how important the message of

salvation was, that this band presented to the youth. They were bringing the message of Christ to kids. It was a mission from God I think. Can we save the humans? Can we communicate to people through music and culture? Can we show them what people give up for this message? *Operation Save the Humans* was a break through message for the Underground bands.

In response to good CD releases the scene grew far beyond what anyone could have imagined. Roger from Embodiment 12:14 commented: “To start with, around 1995 there were only a handful of Christian bands and then by 1996 there was, say, around ten bands. In the next couple of years there were over a hundred Christian bands in Adelaide.”

The Christian band scene had become well developed. There was a growing number of young bands starting out and getting involved in the community. It was hard to see this energy ever dissipating; it seemed a growing snowball. The size of the Christian scene went massive!

The *Save the Humans* record really promoted a close network of bands. By the time the band released their second EP, Sam from Seraphs noticed that there had been a lot of growth in the Christian music scene. He became fully aware of just how big these bands were becoming when he looked at the state music charts. He saw that about eight out of the ten bands in the South Australian music charts had come from the Underground. At the time Sam said that he did not really think about it very much – the band was always looking to the next thing, the next EP, or the next show. It’s not like anyone stopped and declared that we had created a movement or anything like that. We all kept rolling with it, but there was a realisation that there was something happening.

“It was awesome to be a part of the Christian music scene around that time,” Sam said.

The Underground establishment provided many bands with their first gig. Edison was among those who started out at the Underground. “The venue provided us with good opportunities,” said Matt Ho and Rachel from Edison. The door was always open to play a show. The premise provided a home and a first port of call for many Christians. It was a place for bands to start out.

Edison formed in the year 2000, but as mentioned earlier, this band evolved out of another group called Hone. Matt and Rachel from Edison were close friends with Darren Thompson and this friendship really helped

to develop both bands. Edison shared the journey with Thinktank. I think they fed off each other a fair bit. These two bands would be at the epicentre of the Christian scene.

Edison built a sound based on dynamic rock and roll. They loved classic guitar hooks and melancholy pop melodies. Edison's music was inspiring and powerful. They were a band that seemed to keep on developing and progressing. They were becoming more and more prominent in the scene as time went on. Edison were another band that was always on the improve.

Edison first released a demo in 2000. I think this may have been mainly for the industry. This helped the band to quickly get into the scene and establish themselves. They already had quite a lot of experience going into this first demo, through their previous band Hone. They were well loved by the scene and the industry already. Their new band came as a breath of fresh air to the Underground. Edison quickly became one of the leading bands. Again, they never tried to move into the punk genre; rather Edison had their own emo rock thing going on.

All the Underground bands started out young and grew up together. The Underground was fundamental to the movement. It was a meeting place for the bands. It allowed relationships to grow. People would come to the Underground for a lot of reasons; some would come for the bands and others just for the social side of it. "The Underground was central to what we were doing at the time," said Edison.

With a solid Underground network base behind us all, this group of bands began to explore the Australian music scene further. Lessie Does went on to do some interstate gigs. The Sydney tour was an interesting one for us, some shows were good and some shows went pear-shaped. We had been sent up to Sydney by Arts SA. Lessie was selected to represent the South Australian music industry. Most of the Australian music industry is actually based in Sydney, so it was good to play some showcase gigs in front of record company representatives.

Lessie played at a national music industry festival. We were supposed to play just before the headline band Killing Heidi, which would have been in front of a massive crowd of thousands, but the lineups were changed as the headline band had another gig on later that day. As a result, we had to play last. We still sold a bunch of CDs to the kids who stuck around, but most of the crowd had disappeared after the main band finished up. Several

bands complained about their positions in the lineup being changed. It was the biggest shafting on the day ever; it's not actually usual to have lineup times change on the day. One minute you have the perfect spot and the next you're in trouble. We think it was a conspiracy – record labels pulled some strings, which happens! If you have high level management then they fight for your spot on the festival. That's just how it can be.

The sound engineers pulled our front of house sound out; we were left with a small sound system. It was not a good outcome, to be sent over from Arts SA and to be treated this way. Lessie almost did not bother to play at all, such was our disappointment at the sound. We had a small crowd encouraging us to go on, so the show continued despite the sound guys almost shutting things off completely. They were over it after the bulk of the crowd had left.

Despite all this, we had a loyal crowd stick around and get into our music. It was the show that got away for Lessie though. Lessie Does was a band that could work a crowd into action, and pop punk was growing at that time, so it goes down as a missed opportunity or perhaps a conspiracy story, it's our story anyhow!

Lessie played several shows on small stages later on that weekend and we caught industry having a drink and a chat. The band talked to managers and record company representatives. Lessie received interest and they definitely stuck around and watched our shows. I remember the feedback. They did not like me moving around out of time with the rest of the band and they did not like any drum cymbals in the verses. Singles have no cymbals in the verse and there should be cymbals in the chorus. They also noticed that I struggled with timing a bit. That is simply a brief summary of what they said to us. This was helpful feedback for the band. Sometimes it's hard to take feedback, but when you can implement it, it really helps the band to develop. Representatives of record companies watch and listen to a lot of music so they know what they are looking for. It was pleasing to at least be looked at and recognised by the industry. We could go away and work on a few things.

We had one manager interested in picking up the band, but it never eventuated. The festival did help us to have a good look at the industry side of things and see how it all worked a bit more. We came away realising that Adelaide has such a small music industry compared to the national hub in

Sydney. It's amazing how much God was using our small town to generate and propel the national Christian music industry when you consider how small the Adelaide secular music scene was compared to the rest of Australia.

One night the band was running late for a show in Sydney and we were waiting for a taxi. Lessie was on tour and we had the whole thing on camera. The drama was unfolding before me as I was taping everyone's reactions to the crisis. Was Lessie ever going to make our show in Sydney? Eventually the taxi rocked up after some time and we made the gig. It was lucky this was just a small show and not in front of representatives from the industry. We did not know at the time, however, whether or not industry reps would be turning up, so there was a bit more stress for the band at the time. Out of all the shows we did in Sydney this was actually a good one to be a little chaotic, for the reason that it was the only one we did not have reps watching us.

The tour had its dramas. I lost the video camera to top things off at the end but, through it all, we got our name out there and in front of the industry. The whole Sydney tour was a showcase for the band. Lessie Does was representing Arts SA and flying the flag for South Australian music. The whole tour could be described as a life experience. We had a look at the industry and we had seen the good and bad side of it.

Lessie also toured to Melbourne for a street press magazine show at some stage. It was the magazine's birthday and Lessie was booked as an interstate band to come over for the show. We checked out the surf as soon as we arrived but we were pressed for time and the waves were very blown out that day, so it was off to the gig. Lessie was supporting a national Triple J band that night. The tour helped us to check out the Melbourne venues and see what was going on. This road trip did take a toll on Jeremy's classic yellow Kingswood, the engine blew up from towing a trailer.

We had more car trouble on another country tour. It was all safe travelling until in the end, where I crashed the trailer into the back of my car while reversing out of the driveway at Andrew's house. It was a good road trip and a good little tour. It made me think though we were better off hiring a car next time. Vans are so much better for touring than pulling a trailer, mental note! With a van you often don't even need a trailer!

The only other band crash that I can recall was at the Flinders Uni O'Ball. Somehow the lead band on the bill that night crashed into Andrew's

car in the loading zone. These were small crashes in the end, considering all the miles we travelled to and from gigs. Praise God for keeping the band safe on the road!

Tours and gigs would help me to learn what musicians give up for their art work. The life of a musician is not always as glamorous as it seems on TV. Long car trips are also a part of the experience. Often you have to give up full time work as well. Christians also give up things to follow Jesus; some people even give up their lives to follow Him. Christians have been bought by the blood of Jesus.

Bought with Blood

.....

Bought with blood
 This saving grace
 Bought with blood
 This grace so underserved
 Bought with blood
 This saving grace
 Bought with blood
 This grace no one could earn
 Day by day
 Chasing the Wind
 Day by day
 Breathing the air
 Day by day
 Chasing after things
 That will never last
 That will never last
 Open your eyes and just believe
 Open your eyes and just receive
 Open your eyes and just believe
 Open your eyes and you will see
 Just open up your heart and just receive
 Open up your heart and just believe
 Just open up your heart and just receive
 Open up your heart and just believe
 Nail pierced hands, crown of thorns
 Nail pierced feet, bruised and torn
 Stripes on His back
 Whipped and beaten
 Innocent blood shed for your freedom

CHAPTER 10

Recording Time

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2001

*So I'll try to live my life,
like Christ, stay true
until I die, but not forget
where I came from.*

Song Writer, *When Words Fail*
STR

AFTER SEVERAL FUN YEARS OF SHOWS SUPPORTING the *Place of Harmony* CD, it was time for Lessie Does to hit the recording studio again. It had actually been several years from the last time our band went into the studio. We had not laid down any tracks since 1999. This was mainly due to the success of the *Place of Harmony* EP. Our band had progressed and developed a lot during this period and it was now recording time once again. Lessie Does worked hard in the lead up to our third EP, by enhancing our live show, developing our sound and improving our equipment.

Lessie enjoyed playing at a few Adelaide 'O' Balls. This show kicked off the year for Uni students. It was one of my favourite gigs. The weather was usually nice and warm and the evening time slot suited the Australian climate. This show always displayed a good mix of indoor and outdoor stages. Lessie used to love to play on the small stage upstairs. The room would fill up really well. It could get very packed out and the small stage

had an amazing atmosphere. There is something special about a full room of people when you're about to play. It was always cool to complete your set and then catch some of the bigger bands back stage. The 'O' Ball was an important show on the Lessie Does calendar as it helped us to gain a lot of exposure in the secular scene. The Underground bands were well represented at the 'O' Ball in those years.

The scene was very much alive at this stage. All the bands had good momentum at this point. I think each group had a lot of hope for the future. The bands were starting to make good progress in the secular scene through festivals like the Adelaide 'O' Ball and also through national and international support shows. However it was quality recordings and production that these bands needed in order to further break into the secular music world.

In 2001 the Underground bands were putting out more records and hitting the recording studio again and again. New CD releases helped these bands to remain at the forefront of the Adelaide secular music scene. Developing recording methods was an important part of the whole process. Christian bands established an excellent standard during this time.

Lessie began progressing nicely towards producing our third EP. We were not in a rush to put something out; rather the band took its time. We spent a lot longer on pre-production and we had more songs to choose from this time round. As a band we were determined to take our time and get things right on this one. We were really looking to push our own standards up as much as we could.

The new record was put on the back burner on the odd occasion. When the waves were up Lessie was in trouble at times. If we were in sight of the surf Jeremy would get so pumped, he then keened everyone else up and then he'd be out there in a flash. Jeremy was always so fired up, he was hard to stop. He would be the first one fully suited up and in the water. Jeremy usually was catching his first wave when we were still on the beach.

Sometimes it was almost impossible to practice if the waves were up. Band practice versus surfing was a common conflict of interest. Jeremy was way into it in those days, he loved body boarding. There would be the odd heated discussion over it. Some days Lang would have to resign to the fact that it was a surf day. However Jeremy had so much energy he could surf more and write more songs than all of us anyway. He was a talented

man and on the odd occasion, practice would have to wait for good surf. Jeremy is kind of a superman musician and surfer; he had the ability to pack a lot into his day.

Being a band into surfing, Lessie Does had friends in the industry. Surf shops, like JR's, helped the band out a lot. They provided sponsorship in the way of clothing, shoes and sunglasses for us. They extended support by selling our CDs in the store. We shared a good partnership for years. Lessie was blessed by this support and friendship.

Surfing was a part of our music; it helped us to be united with the world, which is important. Surfing is very much a symbol of Australian culture; it's kind of an icon of who we are as a nation. Australians love the beach and the surf. This natural connection with creation helped the band's identity to grow. Surfing allowed people to understand where we were coming from. It is important that people can relate to you. Music is a lot about a relationship with people. Surfing helped the world to connect with Lessie Does.

I used to wear some bright and loud surf clothes in those days when we were sponsored. Having fun with clothes is a cool part of being in a band. We had this awesome shoe deal going on with Globe; but I never took full advantage of it enough. I could have been wearing these surf shoes for the rest of my life! Jeremy on the other hand seemed to be walking around with a different pair of Globes on every time I saw him. He was definitely the styler of the band; he always looked slick, top to bottom. Surf clothes gave us identity; kids knew where we were coming from. We were Christian surfers in a band.

The band never forced an unnatural image. We did not plan out our look that much. We were simply surfers in a band so it was a natural thing to end up this way. We were jeans and surf t-shirt. That was Lessie. This solved all our identity issues; we were never questioning what to wear. Surfing took care of this problem. When you have your image down in this world it stops you from being shifted around. It actually solves your identity issues. When you know exactly who you are as a person it can be a very helpful and powerful thing. That way you're not pushed around, ever.

Even though we had a band uniform so to speak, I still had personal issues. I was a bodyboarder, but I was an injured one, so I was half out of the scene as well by this time. I was a Christian who was not going to

church or living a Christian life. I was in a band but I was struggling to play well enough to stay in due to health issues. I was having increasing timing problems and I was also having trouble playing some songs. It's no wonder that I was having self esteem issues and identity issues. The surf band uniform was something that did help.

"Clothes don't make the man; it's what's inside that really counts – which is contrary to everything we are told by society! If you base your self-worth on things like fashion and trends then it's bound to let you down, all you need can be found in God and how much He values you as a person, straight up." [**The Frugals**] I know that trends are short-lived compared to the eternal love of God.

I agree with the Frugals that clothes are nowhere near as important as our relationship with God, but at the same time they can remove issues that are thrown up at us by the world. It's true that deep down our self worth is found through God's love for us. However I think fashion helped me to relate and fit into the world. It actually removed the whole issue for me by having surf labels. I never worried about clothes or what to wear in a band because I had identity through surfing.

I also had a classic Australian surf car. By 2001 I had paid off my first vehicle, which was a white Holden station wagon. It was a great car for carting around all my gear and going on surf missions. There's something special about your first car. It's all the freedom that comes with it. I was regularly racking up the kilometres travelling from northern Adelaide, down to the south of Adelaide for band practice and then back out to my Grandma's house in the Western suburbs. I was everywhere in just one day.

Whilst driving I would listen to music the whole time. I used to get way into albums. I would spin an album for several weeks at a time if I liked it, nonstop two or three hours a day. I spent a lot of time getting into music, but I did not have the same time or perhaps energy left to put into song writing after a day of teaching. Back pain was also a considerable factor in blocking art and music. I was in so much pain that practice and driving became difficult and far less enjoyable. My surfing injury was starting to get on top of me.

I would write a few songs here and there but I could never get my ideas across to the band. I could not sing very well which didn't help. I really needed to have some way of recording my ideas, but I didn't. I did not get another song out with the band ever. 'Not Too Late to Change' on the

Place of Harmony EP was the last song that I would get done through the band.

I grew frustrated with Lessie, as I felt that I no longer had a voice at all. The band could never hear the songs properly as I just couldn't sing well enough to convey what I had written. I had a lot of colds from teaching and my voice was always wrecked from shouting out on the oval. Writing good melody lines was impossible for me to do with a destroyed voice and no recording device.

I had to change my whole mind set about being in an original band. What was my role going to be now? I was not writing songs anymore, although I never gave up on this. I still put the odd song to the band but they were not quite up to standard. I did not have enough energy to fully develop my songs. Also it's very hard to do good art under time pressure and constraints. Lessie Does was now down to two songwriters, Andrew Lang and Jeremy Owen.

I think sometimes less songwriters can be an advantage anyway, but it did slow our production process down somewhat. Jeremy had established himself as the main songwriter in the band. He kept pumping out really good songs. I think his song-writing as a result was getting better and better. Jeremy had now grown into a very confident and mature musician.

If I wasn't going to write any more songs with the band then I decided that I could help our sound improve greatly. I started leading the way in equipment development; this was something I could do. I had a bit of cash saved up through working as a teacher. I bought a Marshall 2000 head and a classic silver Marshall quad box. I later bought a Gibson Les Paul guitar. It's the kind of musical equipment that you dream of as a kid. When you finally have these beautiful sounds coming out it is like a dream coming true. It was a real sense of achievement. In 2001 Lessie Does would invest and upgrade in a lot of equipment. We developed a big sound and we became a far more professional band.

By this stage Lessie found ourselves a permanent sound engineer. This helped us to hone and develop our music and live shows a lot more. He took the band to a much higher level than we could have on our own. The sound engineer worked for a music store and he was able to help our group develop with the equipment side of things as well. Previously the band would be playing each show with a different mixer so things were much more hit and miss. With a sound engineer you could create a good

understanding between the band and the engineer and our whole sound greatly improved as a result.

The band was well on the way to creating a national product as a result of these improvements. Although things had been a lot slower this time in regards to songwriting, the longer time actually helped the band to refine songs and sounds. We were spending more energy on pre-production now. This meant we would chop songs up and look at each section, before putting them all back together again. We spent time recording demos and sending music off to producers. We managed to attract an international producer and engineer for the record. This was a major breakthrough for the band. All the hard work of developing sounds and songs had paid off. This would elevate the band's third EP to an international standard.

Lessie Does recorded in 2001 at Mixmasters studios. Mixmasters was my favourite studio in Adelaide, so I was over the moon with the whole experience. It's this underground room dug into a hill and its set up really well for recording. The walls are done in mud brick style. I just love the big room with the wooden floors and soft lighting. There is so much cool gear there. The place feels like your home. It makes you feel so relaxed and comfortable. It's the kind of place you want to spend some time in and make a record.

Mixmasters studio has atmosphere that just makes you want to play music all day and all night. Some very cool bands have recorded there, both classic Adelaide bands and national acts. We had our favourite studio and an international producer and engineer. Lessie Does was set for some quality recording experiences. It was a special time and a big step up for the band.

Jeremy and Andrew were both super stars in the recording studio. I think Jeremy is like a Mr Cool in the studio. He is so relaxed and he generally gets things right pretty quickly. You have to get way fired up when you're a punk drummer. Jeremy always had a good mix of being fired up yet very cool, calm and collected at the same time. Andrew, on the other hand, got mega-pumped to perform, especially to sing. His guitar work was amazing and he would work extremely hard on his vocals. Jeremy is a bit more of a natural singer, but Andrew has learnt his craft over the years to become an awesome belter. He has a huge amount of force behind his voice.

The whole recording process stretched over the year. We planned to get the EP out in 2001, but it took a little bit longer. It was well worth the wait

though. We had recorded something that we were happy with musically speaking. The band had located its sound a lot more on this record. We made a unified and slick product. The band learnt an awful lot through this recording process.

The lyrics on the record were not overtly Christian at all. I think we had tamed things back far too much again. We were in danger of forgetting who we were as people. Were we trying to live our lives like Christ? Were we staying true to the Christian scene? I think we had forgotten where we had come from as a band. Our music was always positive, but we just didn't have a Christian voice on this record at all, which was a little disappointing after the *Place of Harmony*. It was not really by mistake either. Lessie Does was putting out a world EP by choice; it was where the band was at.

This record was a step away from the Christian scene in some regards. However at the same time as recording this new EP we were playing on the Christian Harold Festival. Through our live performances, we continued to play a mix of Christian and world poetry; this was always the mix the band put out right through to the end. This was Lessie Does; we were both world poets and Christians. However it would have been good to have had at least one strong message on the EP. I feel in some ways we did not stay true to our beliefs on this record, or at least we did not project our beliefs enough.

The EP was completed later that year. It was titled *Living Right Now*. We played with the words of one of our favourite songs called 'Livin' Easy'. The band was into grabbing the moment and living right now. Again the message was positive, but rather world-based. The theme of the beach came out again in our artwork. Lessie Does was never too far from the beach throughout our whole band career.

We were not the key band in the Underground movement from a lyrical perspective. I think Lessie added positive fun music and a couple of very important messages. It's not like we brought it home in every song like some of the other bands, which I think has its place in the world also. Lessie Does was a good outreach band. We played most of our shows in the world. I am happy with how God did use the band and how He helped us to do shows like Harold.

God was able to use what we did for a much bigger plan than what we could have brought to the table. He had a plan for the whole state and the whole nation; Lessie was really just a small part of the bigger picture.

When you see everything in perspective I can understand how God was using Lessie as an outreach band, but then that takes hindsight and greater perspective which you can't always see when you're busy living it out.

We were advised not to play the 2001 Harold show by our engineer as Lang had to record vocals that week. As a band we decided to do it anyway. This was maybe a mistake, but we just did it. We all rocked out hard although I'm not sure how hard Lang would have sang that night. He was aiming to go easy. The Harold shows were always a lot of fun and that night was no exception. I must admit that I was a bit nervous about Andrew's vocal chords being rested enough to record, but I think that's Andrew's strength – he has a pretty strong voice and he can certainly sing for long periods. All the same I would not recommend doing a show and recording in the future; it's not worth it. If it was not the Harold Festival then there was no way that we would have done the show.

That year Lessie would make it onto our first ever US compilation CD, with our popular punk song 'Give Away'. The record company loved the song and they got in contact with us. It was cool because they approached the band and things went from there. It was one of those little goals that you dream of when you're in a band, so it was nice to achieve this. The song sits OK, considering some of these US punk bands would have a much higher recording budget. United Punks was Lessie's first ever appearance on a US-based international compilation record.

While Lessie was in the recording studio STR put out their debut EP. STR's first EP, *When Words Fail*, was recorded at Soundhouse Studios. This was still the main option for Underground bands. Soundhouse were producing great quality music at a price bands could afford. It was definitely the studio to go through and it was the home of recording for most key Christian groups. The lyrics on STR's first EP were very strong. Their message was definitely a wakeup call for people and for the band themselves!

STR aimed to reach as many people as they could with their music. The lyrics shared a lot of personal stuff. They had a good look at themselves rather than pointing at others. They tried to remove the plank from their own eyes so to speak. This first EP will always remain as a classic Underground band release. It was a highly popular EP and certainly one for the collection! It's a classic.

The lyrics of 'Nevertheless' share some insight as to where STR was at

with communicating their faith. The band writes that they were living by example, but at the same time falling short of what they were called to be. STR was striving to be better than they had been before. They came to the realisation that they would always fall but one day their struggles would end and that they would go to heaven. STR shared strong Christian lyrics on this debut EP that would capture the interest of many kids.

Another classic Underground band Hometime also put out their debut album *Choices* in 2001. Recording your first record is not an easy task. The band started out mainly producing pop punk tunes. Hanna Smith played an important role with Hometime. Hanna was the drummer for the band. She had a simple style, but she played punk well. I must say that the *Choices* record has some amazing lyrics on it.

Together Hometime recorded thirteen tracks. MXPX and Slick Shoes were the band's main influences. The album is covered in amazing guitar riffs. The CD was launched at the Underground venue. Their debut album was a success. Hometime became a key band in the Underground scene through this recording. They learnt a lot from these early beginnings.

The second track on *Choices*, 'Everything,' reveals a strong Christian message from Hometime: "Don't want to live a life of compromise; don't want to live a two-faced double life, no! no! Don't want to do the things you hate, don't want to let this life you gave me waste away." God calls us to follow Him and not waste our life. Hometime encourage us to live our life with God. This song speaks to me now, because I know I was living a life of compromise at the time. I got so sick of compromising my faith that I would feel sick inside.

I decided to have a sick day from teaching as I had a bad cold that year. I was lying in bed feeling sorry for myself when Jeremy called me up.

"Do you want to put up some posters today?" he asked.

I was talked into the poster mission by Jeremy and off we went, taping up posters to poles all afternoon. We got busted an hour into our mission by a council worker. It was funny because my Dad works for the same council. The worker explained that every poster that was left up would cop a big fine. So then we had to go around pulling down a whole heap of band posters for the remainder of the day. I was busted on my sick day. Not the easiest story to explain to Dad.

Posters were often a war in themselves. They helped us to advertise up

and coming gigs with bigger bands. Support shows played an important role in further projecting the bands into the secular scene. Once the Underground bands were good enough to reach this level it gave them a chance to play in front of much larger crowds. Support shows helped to push these bands further into their own particular genre and this lifted them up to a new level. Playing with nationals and internationals was such a great opportunity for the bands.

Lessie Does enjoyed playing support shows. Warming up a crowd is something you have to work at. We learnt to go even harder on supports. You have to work hard to fire up the crowds when you're on first. You know that when the crowd is way into your set, that it's going to be a good band night. When the opening band has got the crowd pumped up, it's a sign that things are going to go off later on!

Support shows helped Lessie to get our name out into the wider secular scene. Getting to play in front of huge crowds, on a bigger sound system and on massive stages is a good experience. It helps to propel the band further and prepares you for future tours and things to come. Doing a heap of supports was a good learning experience for Lessie Does and for the other Underground bands.

My favourite ever support was with a US punk rock band, The Ataris. Lessie Does was on first, but it was already packed out. The show was sold out. The crowd was way into us. They fired up right from the start. Seraphs Coal was actually on next, so we would have had some good crowd crossover going on. Seraphs Coal fans know how to mosh and get into music. They all fired up for us that night and when it was their turn, the crowd went ballistic for them! This was my favourite support show from a crowd reaction perspective, plus way cool bands!

You could learn a huge amount from watching international bands. They were international acts for a reason. They do things at a higher level. Their energy and performance was outstanding, as too their stage presence, song flow, crowd interactions, sound engineers, guitar techs and lighting. You could enjoy them and have a good look at their show. Watching these groups inspired you to take things to the next level as a band.

It was important to learn from the world through these support gigs, but also as Christian artists it was important to learn from Jesus and to learn from each other. Underground bands were very much feeding off each

other. Every record added something to the larger scene and each record shared a message from the Holy Spirit. Recording time allowed the bands to express what they were learning and doing with the larger Christian world.

As independent as every band was, we were still connected through Christian festivals, where bands would come together. The Harold Festival, for example, was an important one for the Underground bands, because of its pure size. It was the biggest Christian show of the year for many reasons in Adelaide. Festivals would unite and connect the whole community. They brought everything together; radio joined in, as did churches, youth groups and the secular music world as well. Festivals also took the bands to another level where outreach became more possible.

Better Kept Secret

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Years of trial and error
 What have I to show?
 Either we learn from it
 Or fall back in that hole
 So I'll try to live my life, like Christ
 Stay true until I die
 But not forget where I came
 Cause I will never
 Try to hide the life I leave behind
 When I was blinded by the light that is mankind
 That is mankind
 I remember when I thought
 I was invincible
 Until my life came crashing
 Up against a wall
 So I'll try to live my life, like Christ
 Stay true until I die
 But not forget where I came
 Cause I will never
 Try to hide the life I leave behind
 When I was blinded by the light that is mankind
 When I was blinded by the light that is mankind
 That is mankind
 (I'm going) I'm far away from where I've been to
 (I'm going) I'm far away from where I'm going
 Gone...

ARTIST *All words and music by STR* ■ BAND *STR*

SONG *Better kept Secret* ■ RECORD *When Words Fail, EP* © 2001



Lessie Does photo session at Magic Mountain.

Lessie Does photo session
at Magic Mountain.

TRUST JESUS



Lessie Does live performance
at the Adelaide UniBar.





Lessie Does live performance
at the Adelaide UniBar.



Recording session for *Livin' Right Now*
at Mixmasters Recording Studio,
Hawthorndene, SA.
Produced and engineered by Phil McKellar.



LESSIE DOES



Jesus
christ



Lessie Does photo session at Flinders University.





LESSIE DOES

Lessie Does appearing at Krypton Discs, Glenelg, SA. The Lessie Does EPs *Place of Harmony* and *Livin' Right Now* both went #1 on the SAMIA Music Chart largely as a result of sales in stores like this.

CHAPTER 11

Festivals



They were announced BEST NEW ARTIST for the Blackstump band competition that they had forgotten about entering, which among many things gave them the chance to play before Beanbag on the main stage. The set began with the band's mascot 'Monkey Boy' riding in on a Harley Davidson, climbing up the speaker stack and onto the stage and the Frugals raining down twelve minutes of ska-rock fury! It had been a big day for a band that still had no idea of what was going on.

The Frugals, 2005

MY POPPA'S NAME WAS HAROLD; he was on my Dad's side of the family. Harold was adopted as a child, but he kept his original surname Baker, as far as we know. It was kind of cool having a Christian festival bearing his name. Not that the festival was named after him, but still it brings back good memories of him for me. My Poppa worked on the Port Adelaide docks most of his life. He was a hard worker; he was not overly big in size, but he was rather strong. In World War II he could not join the army and fight in the war, as he was required to work on the docks; his job was considered important for the running of the nation. Harold also loved sport and he was good at it too. The Harold festival helps me to remember Poppa with love. Harold passed away in 1990.

When I saw a Harold hat at the Christian festival I had to buy it. I keep

it in my room and it helps me to remember who I am, who my Poppa was and what I'm on about. I am a supporter of family and Christian music. It's my favourite truckie hat. Harold is a special festival for me for all of those reasons. It is sentimental and also it represents what I'm on about. For me it's one word that sums up a whole heap of things and it helps to define my identity as a person.

One of my favourite Lessie Does Harold festivals was at the Bethlehem Lutheran Church. The festival was gaining more and more momentum each year. However at this stage it was still in its infancy. Lessie actually had another show on that night so we asked to play early on in the evening. I remember the upstairs room was completely packed with a great atmosphere. Lessie Does slid around on the old dusty wooden floorboards as we rocked out to the crowd in the upstairs room. The Bethlehem stage was a good stepping stone for the festival. Bigger things were to come however. The crowds really got into the bands that night. When you came to a Harold show you saw a lot of familiar faces. The crowd actually outgrew the venue and the festival had to look for a bigger home.

When Lessie Does played at a Christian festival it was time to go for it. A festival meant time to go hard and time to see what we could do on stage. It was definitely not Lessie to sit back and relax. I remember climbing up a few speakers and jumping off them, which was a real rush until I rolled my ankle one Harold show and that would be the last speaker jump I would ever do! Luckily I was able to continue for the rest of the show, but it did hurt; fortunately I managed to finish the gig. I think that was the same night I bought the Harold hat. It was one of my trademark stage moves to jump off things, but my time of jumping around and jumping off things was over. At least I had the Harold hat to remember Poppa and the festival by.

Christian festivals back then had the power of uniting the whole community together. Things had become much bigger than simply just an Underground band scene. The Harold festivals were then the largest indie Christian band event in South Australia, and what was special about them was that they were 100% youth focused. Essentially Harold was a punk, rock and hardcore festival.

Whilst Harold was Adelaide's baby, it did extend its wings interstate. Several outstanding Harold shows were held in Melbourne, Victoria. I think

it was Sam Russell who developed an extremely important relationship between Melbourne Christian bands and Adelaide bands. Sam was the key organiser behind Harold. He initially brought over large Melbourne bands like Antiskeptic, Wishful Thinking and Sounds Like Chicken to the festival. These shows allowed relationships to form and from there the Melbourne Harold was born.

These Harold gigs were very important events on the national calendar. Large Christian shows provided a real showcase for what was going on in the country. Harold gigs were kind of a celebration for the bands and for the people who went to them.

Harold supported Australia's Christian band circuit in a big way. The larger festivals such as Black Stump would feed off Harold. Whilst Harold no longer exists, Black Stump festivals continue to be held at the Cataract Scout Park, in Appin, New South Wales. This is one of the most important shows of the year for Christian bands in Australia. It displays a real showcase of talent. Each year the line up is massive. Some of the best bands and solo artists from all around Australia gather to perform to eager and excited fans. It remains a key event for Christian music lovers in Australia. I encourage you to journey to Black Stump in New South Wales for a quality music experience.

It is also extremely important to mention the Parachute music festival in New Zealand; at the time Harold was around, this festival was already growing to become one of the leading Christian band shows in New Zealand. In many ways this particular festival had already grown to become much bigger than Harold, as this show catered for a wide range of Christian musical tastes. Parachute festival combined worship music with band music in order to pull everyone together, and this allowed outreach to become possible. This combination of worship and bands further inspired a growing community. If you're ever looking for a cool Christian show and adventure, then check out the Parachute music festival in New Zealand.

When you're playing shows every week you take for granted the ministry opportunities that you are presented with. Lessie Does was doing a gig most weeks. The outreach potential is huge especially when you get to play in Christian festivals. At the time I know I took this ministry a bit for granted, it was simply who we were and what we were into.

Original Christian artists helped to provide a lot of outreach events

for youth groups. My heart goes out to the kids who came along to these shows and were on the outer of church circles; they needed so much more support than we could offer or give them. It's not easy being a Christian if you're an outsider. You truly need to desperately get in community in order to receive the full love that Christ has to give you. Christian festivals are a great starting point; however, they alone are not the solution for people to become Christians.

In some ways a music festival can be the ultimate celebration of being a Christian. It can be a full release and a powerful connection with God and other Christians. Standing with your arms raised to the heavens and singing words into your soul can be so uplifting, but it can equally be a lonely experience if you're not in full fellowship. For some people it's a spiritual high and then they are left without the full support of Christian friends. However music alone, by itself is a very powerful connection with our Creator; it draws us close to Him. Harold and Blackstump shows certainly made a statement and they drew many people near to God.

The band network was so strong that it allowed people to be saved. The Underground helped to foster a musical culture which would one day grow up into a festival. This Harold show provided a special environment that established faith amongst humans. It supported Christian culture; it supported growth and development in people.

A classic example of Christian youth culture that came out of these Harold shows was clothing. Kids started wearing band t-shirts in a big way. I mean people had got into band t-shirts before through STR, but now a small Christian clothing label had formed. Julian Lee developed his own brand called Hot Cross Culture. It was well received by the fans who went to these Underground community shows. It was a massive thing for the scene to have a label. Kids could now express what they were into, not just through buying records, but also by making a fashion statement. The label suddenly got massive exposure through its presence at lots of Christian shows. The Harold festival also put out their own merchandise and of course that's where my Harold hat came from.

This festival built the youth up; many of these kids who went to Harold gigs experienced the Holy Spirit working through them. What came out of these events was a desire for people to get even more into Christian music. You could say that this generation of humans was wearing Jesus on their

sleeves again and they were certainly listening.

Christian music however is only one aspect of actually being a Christian. People need prayer, teaching, fellowship, love and encouragement. Christian rock shows like Harold cannot always provide all of the above, but they are a great starting point. If it's all you have, then it's a good one to have. Music feeds us; if we can take a deeper look into the lyrics, then we can learn a lot about Jesus.

The challenge was always to get the kids further into the bands, more than simply enjoying the festival atmosphere. It was surprising how switched on some kids in the scene were. Some people knew exactly what the bands were singing about, they knew all the lyrics and they would be singing along to the songs at the festivals.

Sometimes I think the fans were learning more about Jesus than me. I was so focused on playing and doing what I had to do, which is important, but fans can soak up the whole picture. A Harold fan could watch and get into so many bands. I would watch them sing along; they sang so boldly and with all of their being. It was obvious that these kids loved the lyrics. The scene was special for that reason. It's cool for humans to identify and connect with Christ in this way. I did not sing along to bands at the time; however I was blessed to watch and see it all happen.

Edison was a popular band at Christian festivals. In their time they played four Black Stump gigs, some Harold shows and a couple of Freedom Party shows, which was another large Christian festival in Adelaide. This show combined dance music with bands in order to create a gig that appealed to a wide range of Christians. It was cool; you could kind of wonder around this big old house and get into both dance music and the best Christian bands going around at the time.

It was extremely interesting for groups like Edison to watch all of the constant improvements made to these Christian festivals over the years. Harold seemed to be better managed each year. Edison was a big part of the whole Christian rock and roll show, simply meaning they were a popular band to watch. They had a real genuine performance style, and they always seemed a very real band to me. What you saw was what you got with Edison. Hence, they became a fundamentally important band at Christian festivals.

Seraphs Coal was another band that was always sought after when it

came to Christian festivals in Australia. They however made a concerted effort to not always be associated with only Christian events. They tried to be where the people were at. They did play at a Harold or Black Stump festival almost every year. The band expressed that there definitely was some cool Christian festivals that went down.

A few of the leading Underground bands received the call up to play in state and national festivals. Not only were these Christian bands playing at Christian festivals but they were in demand for secular ones as well. It was a great experience to play on the main stage and receive a high quality mix, both on stage and front of house for these groups.

Dan Jones from Seraphs discussed with me how one show in Brisbane went really well. He felt the band was not making any headway in Northern Australia. "It was a bit of a shock to have a packed room with eight hundred kids singing your lyrics," said Dan. They were all going really hard. Playing with nationals and internationals on festival lineups really elevated the groups to new levels. Secular festivals also provided an excellent chance for the bands to bear witness to God in the world.

When it came time for Harold festivals Embodiment 12:14 were sought after as a headline act. Darren Reid actually told me that he never cared if it was a small or a big show; if the kids were getting into the music then that's what made a good night, not the actual size of the show. All the same, Embodiment could carry out a big show as well as anyone.

These gigs further elevated the band's status. They were known as one of the leading groups in the Christian community. Embodiment 12:14 were the kind of band that would also draw in secular audiences to their shows. Harold was a Christian festival, but there were also a lot of kids coming in from the secular band scene in Adelaide. The size of the turn outs was beginning to rival other large music events in the state. Embodiment 12:14 were an important member in the Harold team for the reason that they had national appeal.

Hometime described the Harold festivals as good fun shows. They were able to help and encourage younger bands through the ranks. The band competitions building up to the event helped provide a talent identification system. A heap of young bands would get a chance to play through the Harold festivals. They gave everyone a shot. The Harold shows were also videotaped which gave the bands some feedback. Hometime became

regulars for the Harold festival. They seemed to slowly progress their way up the bill over the years.

This festival would attract large interstate bands to Adelaide. The line ups had become national in standard. Larger bands would come over and check out the scene through these events. The Frugals and Antiskeptic were two of the biggest bands to come over to Adelaide.

Antiskeptic was already growing into a very polished outfit when they arrived at Harold. The band formed in 1999. In their time the group enjoyed nearly ten years of national touring. They completed two full length albums and three EPs. The band then moved from Queensland to Melbourne to further pursue their musical career. Antiskeptic was gaining good momentum by the time they came to Harold.

The Frugals on the other hand quickly made their mark on a rather punk-dominated scene; the band brought some variety in the form of ska music. The Frugals were a band that came together slowly. Shane Shepherd from The Frugals was himself in a heavy metal band for a while before meeting Lachlan. Lachlan discussed the idea of a new concept band. Shane did not actually give it much thought until his own band folded, and then he decided that he would give Lachlan's idea a go in 1997. This was the beginning of The Frugals. They first started playing shows in 1998. They were together as a band for only five years, but in that time they achieved a lot.

The Frugals went big real quick! A small but exciting scene had developed on the north coast of NSW. There were only about twelve Christian bands in the area. The community was also well linked with the secular bands at the time. The Frugals became the biggest band on the north coast of Australia. Even at their reunion show they were able to draw a crowd of 10,000 people. People certainly loved The Frugals!

The band then toured to Adelaide and The Frugals became a popular band in the Underground community. They were invited to several Harold festivals. The band shared many road adventures.

"We noticed the Adelaide scene when we came down for several shows," said Shane Shepherd. "God provided for The Frugals and He really kept us going. We loved Adelaide!"

My first experience of the band was at Harold. I think many people first came to know them through these shows. I was standing right at the back

of the stage watching the band. I discussed with Andrew Lang, whether he thought other states in Australia would push our bands to headline festivals? We were not sure that they would; however upon reflection I think by doing this it elevated the festival to a national standard. They clearly had something different going on to what we were doing in Adelaide, but all the same they had something massive to add.

The band discussed several CD releases with me. The Frugals sound could be described as fun, fast music with ska-based elements. The band released a demo in 1998 before they put out their first EP, *Just What You Need for Christmas*, in 1999. This did exceptionally well and they toured this EP for several years before putting out their first album.

The band's record label pushed their sound around a bit on their album, which they would regret upon reflection. Their debut album was titled *Formula for Success*. They were paying out the whole formula for success in the Christian music scene. They were obviously striving hard to find their own path and direction.

The Frugals had a message to share with people. Lachlan would write most of the lyrics; Shane wrote the music and the rest of the lyrics. Lachlan would come up with stories, some of them would be just fun based songs and others would have a message. For example, 'Geek got the Window Seat' is a song about being picked on at school. God still thinks you're great despite what other people say. Lachlan realised that he could not go on without God. However the band tried not to take themselves too seriously. The Frugals music expressed life with God and the band clearly had a Christian message to share.

The Frugals had to trust in God totally. They felt that playing music could put your faith to the test at times. "Faith is what holds you together when you're writing music", they said. "You have to stick it out in good times and in bad times! God is the centrepiece and you have to place your trust in Him, not yourself."

Hospitality is a real blessing to Christian bands. Shane Shepherd from The Frugals was always amazed how people treated their band when they came over for shows like Harold.

"People were so giving," said Shane. "Hospitality is God in action. We needed help and God was doing His thing."

He now has come to see what people were giving up. Hospitality

enabled not only The Frugals but the wider scene to tour the country.

Shane would later become a key member in the Adelaide scene himself. He loves music and will always be passionate about it. After The Frugals finished up he joined Thinktank as a guitarist. He then went on to do some solo work and several other side projects. He also spent some time helping out with youth music festivals.

Shane played a big role in helping organise the Encounter Schoolies festival. Schoolies week is a massive thing in Australia. This is where high school graduates party and celebrate for one week after exams are finished. Queensland Schoolies is a huge event. While the South Australian festival is not quite as big, it is still very popular and extremely well run. Schoolies festival week went off! It was held down at Victor Harbor, which is located well south of Adelaide. There is some great surf around Victor and it's an amazing place for a summer holiday. Bands played a big part in the celebratory entertainment that was provided at Victor Harbor during schoolies week.

I believe it was a real blessing for our state to have such a large amount of Christian support and help during this key time in young kids' lives. Youth leaders and team members such as Shane Shepherd helped to run procedures. These volunteers made the event safer and they provided outstanding assistance in times of need. Hundreds of Christian volunteers have provided help for police in order to make the event safer for everyone.

Schoolies festival was still a big gig for us, and a fun one to do. I remember Lessie Does played to a packed-out tent one year. The crowd was way into the music. What a great way to share Jesus with kids who were celebrating the end of Year 12. STR was up next. Young fans absolutely adored STR. They had such a huge following at that stage. This festival gave massive exposure for Christian bands. At the time the Christian bands were at the top of the state's music scene, so we all got to play with each other again and again during schoolies week every year. This was a very special time for Christian music in South Australia.

Shane's energy for music is something to be admired. He is an inspirational character in the Australian Christian original music scene. It's people like Shane who helped the groups to keep kicking on. I think we needed some fresh energy there for a while. Shane was highly valuable to us. The foundations had been laid but we needed new ideas and new

talents to come through. Shane Shepherd provided an extraordinarily high level of input for us.

The thing about Christian festivals is that they heavily promote community. It was fair enough for all the bands to be on their own mission and have their own purpose and plans and way of going about things, but shows like Harold brought unity to the scene and as Christians we should be unified through Jesus.

Every Christian band in the community had their own way of expressing their faith that's for sure. It's true that no one band was exactly the same. The groups had different styles of lyrics and different ways of presenting their own faith and this pulled in a variety of people to the larger world of Christian music.

However there was always something special about coming together for Christian festivals. That's when you knew you were a part of something bigger. That's how I would see the magnitude of what was going on, by looking at the lineups on the Christian festivals. God was clearly watching over the whole picture.

For this reason no one actually ever called what we were doing an Underground band movement or anything like that, as it grew a lot bigger than one particular venue. Upon reflection bands have commented that the Underground was simply where things got started for all of us, but the festivals made it something so much bigger.

When you had a full page of bands coming together on one night you could easily see the size of things. By this stage it was no longer only the Underground band community that would come together, but that's how things got started and that's where it all began, at the Underground venue. It was definitely pleasing to see the results of all the foundational work. The community had grown into something bigger now, something national, through festivals.

The Frugals

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THE FRUGALS began in 1997 when a hairless young man by the name of Lachlan Johnston asked another young hairless man named Shane Shepherd to start a band with him. The idea was to create a Frankenstein of music that was as much ska, rock, metal or punk as it was funny to look at.

After many band name suggestions the group decided on FRED ATE FOUR. Several weeks later they worked out that there were more than four people in the band and a new name had to be chosen. The word 'frugal' was found in the dictionary and THE FRUGALS could not rest easy.

THE FRUGALS' first show was held in the small country town of Clunes in an old church twenty minutes from Lismore, NSW. Five hundred kids turned up to see them play and before long the crowd was dancing as if it was 1998... that was the year after all.

Shane Shepherd and Lachlan Johnston

CHAPTER 12

CD Launches



2002

*So you're young, well that's alright,
no matter who you are, and don't believe
there's nothing to say, nothing to say.*

Andrew Kitchen, *Nothing to Say*
ANTISKEPTIK

I BELIEVE I WAS A VESSEL surrounded by thousands of angels in my journey with Jesus, for I see that God had a salvation mission going on, He was speaking through Lessie and through the Underground bands. Yahweh was communicating through these artists. It's only upon reflection I now see that all of the forces of God were working in us and through us. I see that angels were in our midst.

It goes back to the very reason why we all started out as Christian artists. The Underground bands had something to say! They had a message. No matter who we are God can use us if we open ourselves up to Jesus and follow Him. He was able to work through Lessie Does and He certainly used the Underground bands. Don't believe you have nothing to say in life. Simply being too young or too old is not a barrier to God. Don't ever believe that there's nothing for you to say.

God wants to communicate with you no matter where you're at! Stop and think about what message He wants to share through you. What is

Yahweh's message to the world? I believe that God wants to save people, as He shares a message of salvation again and again! I pray that His angels will help you to share your story and your experience with God.

I think that the gathering together of the Christian community was actually one of the most important things that God did through our band. 2002 began with the special release of the *Living Right Now* EP. CD launches were amazing nights for Christians who enjoyed original music. A lot of love and work had gone into this particular project. We launched the EP at the Adelaide Uni Bar on Saturday, February 16. It was almost a birthday party for me as my birthday was on February 14. I was turning 24 years of age. We played with special guests Thinktank, Hummel and J-Ded. We packed them all in that night. The place was full to capacity and then some.

This live performance was perhaps the band's best ever. There was a lot of hype about this release and there was a good vibe about things going into the show. You can play big support shows for national and international bands but there is always something inspiring about headlining your own shows. It's cool knowing this is your crowd and they're into your songs and your music.

J-Ded, were a strong young secular rock band. We thought they had good potential and we used to work in with them quite a lot. We always liked to have at least one band on the lineup from the secular music world, so J-Ded was perfect for the launch night. They opened with a solid set and the room filled quickly.

Hummel were the next band up on the bill. By this stage the room was full. We liked Hummel for their solid rock and roll approach. They were becoming a growingly popular Christian band at that point. Modern rock music was beginning to be very trendy once again around 2002. They were the flavour of the month in the Christian scene and we were stoked to have them on the show.

I remember Thinktank played in all black suits that night at our CD launch. They had just been to a wedding, which they were involved in somehow. They jammed out a really good set! Thinktank were very much getting things going by that stage. Some bands just fire you up to go hard when it's your turn to have a go. Thinktank were definitely one of those!

Lessie was living it that night! We have a lot of classic footage of the show. It goes down as one of my all time favourites. We had brought in a

whole heap of lighting and sound gear in to boost the show. The sound was big! Lessie had put together a set that flowed along nicely. Action was an essential part of our show! We had learnt from the Underground scene how to create a good live performance. Energy in the music was of vital importance to Lessie, especially when launching a record!

It was also important for Lessie to have a crowd reaction and on this night the crowd reacted strongly to our high energy performance. It was cool to see people singing your lyrics and shouting at you. It was what the crowd did with our music that inspired me. If people were way into *Place of Harmony* and they were singing out Christian lyrics then that meant a lot to me and it means even more to me upon reflection. Singing about heaven is good for all of us. It's important to dream but also to live it out. It was a healthy sign for the scene that these Underground bands could fill up the venue so well.

The *Living Right Now* EP went to Number 1 in the state SAMIA music charts. The record sales did very well for several weeks, however the CD did not quite have the same reaction in the Christian music scene as the *Place of Harmony* EP; this was understandable as the message was nowhere near as strong. However the EP did receive national airplay on Triple J which was a good step for the band. By this stage Lessie had achieved national distribution with MGM and good CD sales in Adelaide, which set the band up for touring the country.

Edison also released a stunning debut EP that year called *Blueprint Yesterday*. The five-track EP grabbed people's attention in both the secular and Underground community. The band followed up the release with a solid year of performances. Edison was still a band on the up at this stage, even though most of the other Underground bands were starting to wind down. When others were closing up shop, Edison remained a constant energy force for years to come. Their first EP worked well for the band.

Another band due for a release in 2002 was Seraphs Coal. After several different guitarists John Garrett joined the band to record their debut album, *The More Things Change*. John brought a strong metal influence to the band. He had the ability to rock up and play all the Seraphs songs straight away when he first joined the group. No pressure, his first ever show with Seraphs Coal was a Triple J Live at the Wireless; they played to a national radio audience. No worries though, John could handle it. He

also filled in for Lessie Does with one Uni show that I could not make and from all reports he fitted into the band like a glove. John was just one of those gifted guitarists that could learn songs in a flash. He added some classic metal riffs to the pop punk Seraphs Coal album.

Their national album release was perhaps the pinnacle of Seraphs Coal's journey. I heard that they were one of the highest ever internet requested bands to that date on Triple J. There was a huge public demand for Seraphs on national radio. People were crying out to hear their songs. Despite this though, the band was never given full support by Triple J. It seems a shame because the people really wanted to hear them. They were always the people's band rather than a major record label group. Seraphs Coal had a full-on loyal underground following, these fans totally supported their debut album release, despite a lack of industry endorsement.

Track 7, 'Change the World', on Seraphs Coal's debut album, *The More Things Change*, shares the hope that Seraphs Coal has for individual people. It shares their hope to change the world: "People tell me I'm insane trying to make a difference today; they think my attempts are in vain. You could never save them all so why bother trying at all. Against this view, I will remain."

In 2002 Seraphs Coal was at their highest point from a national popularity perspective. "It seemed almost perfect timing," said Aaron from Embodiment 12:14. "As Seraphs Coal peaked, they passed the baton onto Antiskeptic." The Christian scene was well alive and kicking at that stage! We now had a much more national Christian community developing. The question was, could we build on this platform?

Although Antiskeptic was not part of the Underground band scene as such, they were key members in the Australian Christian music world. The Melbourne-based band Antiskeptic grew quickly to become the leading original Christian band in the nation. They delivered a powerful modern mix of rock and punk. Their lyrics are inspirational and spiritually motivating. Their music has personally encouraged and uplifted me and I find their records truly amazing.

The band received full radio support from Triple J which elevated their position in the scene. I think Seraphs Coal played a key role in pushing the Australian Christian music industry to a new level, but Antiskeptic reached the masses through widespread radio play and touring. Seraphs had a loyal fan base which also loved and supported Antiskeptic. This Christian

network was growing. Original band music was certainly becoming more prominent and more national through these bands.

Several other Melbourne Christian bands were also doing good things around this time. I remember Wishful Thinking and Sounds Like Chicken toured to Adelaide along with Antiskeptic to do several Harold festivals. This was how I became more aware of the Melbourne scene.

Wishful Thinking were a punk band. They played both slow and fast punk and they knew how to deliver it well. The band could attract large crowds. I read about one show where the band pulled a crowd of 500 people to the Corner Hotel. In their time the band released two albums: *Standing Still* and *Kicking Goals, Banging Goals and High Fives all Round*.

Sounds Like Chicken were yet another classic band out of Melbourne. There is something special about Melbourne and music. It does not surprise me that some of the best Christian bands in the nation regularly come out of Melbourne. In fact it's really the cornerstone of the Australian music live scene. Melbourne fans get out to lots of shows and support their favourite bands, that's for sure.

Sounds Like Chicken formed in 1997. They played a blend of ska, hardcore, reggae and rock. I think Sounds Like Chicken added a lot of variety and energy to our national band scene. The band certainly played a big part in helping the Christian band community reach its peak. They also received Triple J radio play with their single 'Take a Bullet to the Grave' and yet again for their tune 'Global Domination'.

Sounds Like Chicken toured with bands like Antiskeptic. These support shows played a massive role in propelling frontline acts such as Antiskeptic. Without the support of these Melbourne acts and further support from Seraphs Coal and groups like Thinktank it would have been much harder for Antiskeptic to carve out a national fan base. All of these bands were working together to build Christian music up in Australia to a new level.

Seraphs Coal was on the verge of going to the next level with Scorpion Entertainment, when Andre decided he did not wish to go full time, due to family and work commitments. His main reason was actually that he liked keeping the band as a ministry rather than a full time career.

"It seems that no one really can ever have full control over their band; it is always the kids who make and define you," Dan Jones said.

The fans steer the band. The band decided that rather than fade out they would finish off on a strong note.

Seraphs Coal put together one final album. They placed all of their recorded material onto one CD called *Sketchbook*. It was a complete back catalogue. The band did it for all the fans that got into them towards the end of their career. There was a whole heap of people at the CD launch that the band had never seen before. The *Sketchbook* album allowed the kids to hear everything the group ever did. It was an appropriate way for them to end their time in the scene.

I found it interesting in an interview with the band that they commented on how much they respected their fans! The connection between people and Seraphs Coal was always strong. They seemed to draw people right into what they were doing. The pureness of this respect is something that I am intrigued by. It really is the love for another person, rather than being above anyone; they chose to love and respect their fans.

The final show for Seraphs will go down as one of the biggest in the history of the Waymouth Street venue's existence. The band decided to do one last show for all the kids at the Underground. The venue had done so much for the group. They wanted to give something back to the place and to all the people who had followed them.

Seraphs decided to form a secret identity as they had already officially finished. On the flyer it read, 'the rumours are true.' It got out that Seraphs Coal were going to play at the Underground and this secret quickly spread all around Adelaide. Seraphs Coal had huge pull, they always did and with rumours of one last show, things were out of control. They could play here anytime and it would be a sold-out show, their final gig was to be no exception. It was packed, it was jam packed! This was the lead band in the scene busting up.

Seraphs played a lot of old material and as a result some people were not aware that it was them at all hiding under their face masks. It was said that there were kids crowd-surfing through the doors at the venue that night for the final Seraphs Coal show. So many people rocked up that they actually had to turn a lot of people away. Even one of the managers could not get in, true story.

The year after the band broke up Dan spent a long time not knowing quite what to do. He had been in a band since being a young teenager. The

breaking up of Seraphs was big, but it wasn't quite the end of everything yet for him. Music is a massive part of Dan Jones and he will probably always be doing something. I hope that music will always be there for us.

By 2002, through the efforts of the *Living Right Now* EP, Lessie Does had secured national distribution with MGM. We then got picked up by a large booking agent just before the *Living Right Now* CD release. The CD launch was a good show for us to start with. The band proved it could do sold out shows to management; this is an important achievement in your home town. If you have a good home base then you often can build on this. Having a national booking agent would give Lessie hope of taking things further.

Straight away the booking agent was able to get higher paid shows for Lessie Does. It's not like the band was chasing cash, but an increase in pay would help with future recordings. When you start off playing in a band you do it for petrol money basically, so it was good to finally get to the point of having some money to put aside for recordings. This was a good sign for the band. Although we were not as booked up as we would have liked to be at that stage.

It was a question of what were we prepared to give up, to get things going. The band was having lots of meetings and discussions during this time together. We were trying to see how things would work for us and what it would look like. I had organised time off work through negotiations with the headmaster at my school. I was contemplating going part-time and I may have even needed to give up my job if I wanted to stay in the band. It was looking like things could progress further. I was certainly thinking about all of my options, but as it turned out things never eventuated any more.

We lost our booking agent at an awkward time and unfortunately we had already committed to national distribution. This meant we lost a lot of money to the distribution company on local record sales which we could have easily collected by ourselves if we stayed more independent. We thought we would need national distribution to get our CDs into the music stores, as we planned to tour the country, but this all completely fell through.

Lessie Does lost a lot of momentum by simply not touring or gigging the EP enough. We did do just enough shows in Adelaide; however the band did not tour interstate at all, which was very disappointing after putting together such a strong product. It was a big block for the band. After a solid release it would be back to the drawing board again for Lessie Does.

Rather than try to tour without a booking agent at this stage, Lessie turned its attention to more recording almost straight away. It was a total change of mindset for us; we went from launching a polished CD, back to recording again in less than a year. The band went from looking to go much more national, back to seeing how else we could develop our music at a grass roots level.

This meant a return to the studio once again. That year Lessie Does recorded another three songs. We had a much lower budget this time around after not gigging the third EP long enough. Funds were way down. We had spent a lot of money on that record hoping for a real breakthrough.

This time round the band decided to put out a single, as we half had the idea of an album in the back of our mind. We never quite got to the point of actually sitting down and saying let's do an album, let's do this! I think the band was somewhat deflated after not doing any national touring. We were so focused on this goal for so long that we lost the enjoyment of playing in the local Underground and secular scene. Having a new recording project did help to give the band a fresh focus and outlook for the future.

Rock was back in around 2002 and Lessie was happy to make the switch. We always loved this style of music anyway. It was a good time to progress in this direction. We were moving away from punk at this stage as a band. Track one, the single 'Another Sunset', was recorded back at Soundhouse Studios, which was really the home of the Underground scene. This was where Lessie had recorded *Place of Harmony*, so it was kind of like coming home for the band anyway.

The lyrics on this single would return the band to a stronger Christian theme again, especially compared to the *Living Right Now* EP. 'Another Sunset' was written by Andrew. I'm not actually sure of what he was writing about, whether the song was about him or another person. However for me 'Another Sunset' gives some insight as to where the band was at and what it was going through at the time. Lessie was still a band searching to capture childhood ambitions right to the end. We were searching to make it! I think Andrew followed this dream more than anyone right until the end. He would pour his heart out on the floor, but destiny would ignore us. At this stage, we were a band that was counting the days. Lessie was getting older. I'm not sure why we felt time pressures though, but we did, we were still very young men when I look back on this time. We were

always trying to find our way right until the end.

We did the vocals this time round, through Tim Rohrlach and then the whole song was mixed interstate by international producer and engineer Phil McKellar. It was a lot of fun to fly over and have this experience. The band recorded two other tracks in a local church with Richard Wundke and these songs were mixed at Life Productions, which was a studio based at the Christian Life FM radio station in Adelaide.

Lessie was now faced with its biggest hurdle. Our bass player Nick had made it clear that this would be his last recording effort with the band and that he would be finishing up soon. This brought Lessie into some further turmoil. As a band we wanted to at least put out this next single; we had done all the work so we decided to continue on for a while at least. After several lengthy discussions Jeremy's brother came in and joined the band as our new drummer and Jeremy moved over to the bass. Tim was such a solid drummer that we would not miss a beat in this department.

Tim Owen was like a metronome; his timing was perfect and he hit the sticks real hard. He fitted into the band perfectly although he was not a singer, so we had lost our three part harmonies. Jeremy could actually play any instrument really well; he is a very talented musician. This meant the band had all Christian members now, so we had several advantages at this stage in the Christian music world. Lessie Does was still alive. We had a new sound and a new line up but we were wounded vocally speaking.

There was some debate between the band about what to do next. Andrew was the most keen out of all of us to go on and do an album. We did several more good shows before the band realised no, this is it; we are going to finish up with the release of this new single, 'Another Sunset'. We just lost more and more momentum and it was hard to pick things up again. It's hard as a band to take backward steps for a long while.

As things were picking up again we decided that was it and that we were going to finish on a high note with this final release. We wanted the band to go out strongly rather than fade away into nothing. 'Another Sunset' was a classic little rock single that lasted a solid four minutes. The whole single was really straight rock. The band spent the rest of the year and the first few months of 2003 preparing for our final CD launch.

Christian bands are blessed to have an opportunity to share Jesus by presenting CDs like 'Another Sunset' to the world. A CD launch meant

that a new message from the Holy Spirit could be added to the bigger picture on this planet, for a new record often reveals what God is doing. I think God loves to hear messages from kids.

Seraphs Coal, Edison, Thinktank, Lessie, Embodiment 12:14, STR, Antiskeptik and many other Christian bands had something to say during this time through their music and even when Lessie did not have a strong message Jesus used the band to gather and unite the scene at CD launches.

Christian CD launches helped to foster this world, the groups and the community were built up by them right until the end. They were kind of like birthday parties for the bands. They were big occasions! CD launches were celebrations for us all—kids, fans, family and friends.

Clear to Pass

.....

Hold my flag high sweet surrender
 Fed myself and I'm so sorry
 Lifted up and I began believing
 Words of affirmation
 Taken from their rightful owner
 Clear to pass, distraction is defeated
 Even though I am a vessel
 Surrounded by a thousand angels
 I forget, neglect it, at times complacent
 Feed this mind with wisdom
 Avoid all thoughts premeditated
 Life is at its best in, simplicity too
 And I am nothing but a slave
 As self belief will lie and keep me down
 My selfishness now lies in waste
 I've learned to keep in sight
 The people who've fallen
 Broken I'm down, falling
 Broken I fall into place
 Broken I'm down, falling
 Broken I'm broken
 Building all on faith and only
 Saying what is good and noble
 Relentless mouth piece for the people I love
 Clear to pass and worthy
 I do nothing for his perfection
 All I am and even need to be too.

CHAPTER 13

Radio Trouble

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2003

*Help me to be the man
that your plan has in store for me,
help me to get up, every time
that I fall short of victory.*

Aaron Mabikafoal, *Make this Life Count*
HOMETIME

TROUBLE AROSE AT THE PEAK OF THE SCENE for the Christian community. The competitive nature of the musicians was a real strength in our development, but it was also the movement's greatest weakness. Competition could at times be unhealthy.

It was almost the downfall of the Christian music world in Adelaide. I know in Lessie Does we were directly competing with other Christian bands for support shows. It was difficult to keep relationships strong during this time. Because the Christian bands were somewhat at the top of the local scene, we were very much competing against each other, more so than against secular bands. Some tensions grew out of this competitive environment.

Rather than competing with one another we should have focused more on building each other up. Unfortunately there were just not enough shows to go around for all the bigger bands in Adelaide. We were not unified

enough! We did not have a record label to push the scene anymore and we were not linked enough together. I think we actually needed more compilation EPs and unified efforts. If the commercial record companies were not going to touch these bands then perhaps we could have been stronger together, but then that's only an afterthought. How things did eventuate had both positive and negative outcomes.

I was definitely not the only person to think the biggest negative for us was a competitive spirit. At times instead of helping each other we were knocking each other down so to speak.

"The scene was flooded at one point and there just were not enough shows to go around," commented STR.

The peak of the movement forced a down time. As bands went out into the bigger music world, some of the community spirit of the Underground was lost.

The band scene became almost like a sport; it was war to get shows and to get ahead, which can actually take the enjoyment out of art a bit. Perhaps we needed to get back to basics and love one another as a team, rather than as competitors. Despite competition for support shows we would all still come together and play at CD launches with each other. This kind of loyal support remained a strong point until everything was done and dusted.

Loyal community support always helped Lessie until the end, and even in the end. As a band Lessie Does had wins and losses in our time. We were a group that was finishing off now in 2003. In some ways you could argue that we failed to ever achieve commercial success as a band. Yet God worked His greater plan through Lessie and through the other Christian groups around us. God shared a message of Jesus to the world through these bands. Yahweh had a plan in store for us. Even after the band was to finish up God would have plans for us as artists, musicians and Christians.

As Lessie was finishing up, I was starting to have a look around at the bigger scene. I couldn't help but notice that some things were working well and yet we were running into some regular problems. There were reasons why the bands fell short of victory. The Australian Christian music scene had some problems around this time. It was not simply our problem or the Underground bands issues; the national scene was simply not highly functional. Australian Christian band music was not flourishing like our

American allies in 2002.

I have been told that the US Christian music scene is approximately the size of our entire secular music base in Australia. There is a lot of talent and some really good bands and musicians now in America. The US Christian scene supports full time artists. Radio, touring, management, distribution, venues and fan bases are much more developed than in Australia. It has actually been the US Christian band community that has become far more successful with the youth. If we did not have these US bands, then we would have a gaping hole in this ministry, not only in Australia, but also around the world. Jesus has worked through America to create original Christian music. This has helped give millions of Christian's identity, purpose, passion and inspiration.

Interviews at Life FM, the local Christian radio station were always slightly chaotic. There were at least three of us in the room to start with, and we all liked to talk. So there were big problems when you had more than one person talking at a time. We had a lot of fun creating trouble in the studio. The presenters could not always control the topics. We used to try to take over the conversations and control the airwaves. For a brief moment in time Lessie would be running the radio station. A Lessie interview was always an interesting affair. We had fun promoting our CDs and gigs at radio stations.

Life FM were big supporters of the Underground Christian music scene, they helped many bands progress. All the groups could go into the station and do interviews and promote releases, key shows and CD launches. Life FM used to support and promote upcoming events. Radio exposure built the scene up to a higher level. It helped the wider public get to know the bands and their music. Christian radio was a very important part of the band community.

Yet radio was one of our key problems in Australia. It was disappointing that the main focus of the Life FM radio station was on commercial ratings. Due to the licence agreement, Life FM had to play a high level of secular music; this was their agreement with the government. Unfortunately the radio station needed ratings to survive commercially speaking. Ratings would dictate music selection. The radio was under pressure to play popular commercial tunes, rather than focus on pushing original Australian Christian band music.

Christian youth music was not pushed enough to build the scene up to a national level that would sustain full-time artists. At the time Christian radio was not linked nationally, things were not co-ordinated sufficiently to help the scene build and grow. The Underground music was running on a pure natural swell. The kids were way into the bands and these bands had a loyal following, but things would stop there.

The venture could never progress to the next level in Australia without the full support of national Christian radio networks. This is simply how things were in Australia in 2002. The Underground movement was halted in this way. Not enough structures in place meant bands would have to gig and build popularity in each State, rather than have huge radio support doing the work for them. You had to be a workhorse to progress.

It could be done, and was done well by several of the Underground bands; however it was a lot of spade work to tour the nation and it was not easy to do without people power and support. Not every band could tour as hard as Seraphs, Embodiment and Thinktank. Many of the Underground bands required radio support that just was not there nationally speaking. As a result we could never evolve the movement any further. A lack of organized radio support was a major block.

The bands could never grow and develop to become more like the US scene. All the ground routes were there. The bands were waiting to be picked up by management, record labels and radio, but these structures just didn't exist in Australia at this point of time. Bands were lining up by the dozen; the Australian national Christian scene was huge at this point. It was ready to go national, but the radio stations were simply not geared up to go this way.

It's a shame that we play US Christian music on our radios all day long, yet we did not foster our own music enough! US Christian music is awesome; it's at another level. They have excellent bands, lyrics, radio, support and networks. There is a lot Australia could learn from the US Christian music scene. The Underground music was there and knocking on the door, but it did not break through to the nation enough and then it largely disappeared. We missed our opportunity this time round. We did not follow the US and build a large original Christian music scene that could sustain artists.

I think Australia is in such a desperate need for Christian music that

now we need the US bands more than ever, but there was a time when we could have grown and developed our own music more. Things come in cycles and things change a lot, so it's possible that it could grow again in the future. This is how it was for the Underground scene. We were all there, but the bigger structures were not in place.

Youth Christian music has now been done! It's not a new thing anymore. It's all there for the kids. Whatever style you're into, it's there. However culture is always changing, so it's not like we can rest on our works, music and culture never stops, the creative process goes on and on and on. There are awesome US Christian bands around today for kids and rockers! Without this music many people would be lost in the world. Christian rock music brings Christ to everyone. It shows us who He is. He is the Saviour that comes and meets us where we are at.

I got so angry at the radio station when I could see the dead end for all these bands at the Underground. Without national support it was not going anywhere. "This song is getting ratings, so we are going to play it" was the bottom line from the station, which is fair enough on one hand, but if we were going to play Christian rock music, then why couldn't we build up our own Christian bands more.

I was angry at this point, but what could I do, I was simply a guitarist in a band. I felt powerless in the Australian Christian music scene. How could we grow and develop this more? I hoped things would change in the future, because this was such a waste. We had the biggest snowball of Christian bands ever in Australia and it was coming to an end very quickly.

This meant the only scene that was big enough to grow the Underground bands was actually the secular music world. The problem was that the lyrics from the groups were always quite strong and therefore not what the secular record companies were really after at the time. The music was of high quality and was gaining some secular radio support. However without record labels behind these bands, they were not able to achieve high rotation regularly. All the same they were quite popular on Triple J. The Underground bands were knocking on the door of the secular music world constantly.

It was a strong Christian-based movement. I don't think we can totally blame the world for not embracing it further. If Christian radio in Australia was not going to push these bands harder then how could we expect the

world to push the music? National radio was interested but not completely sold on it either. The bands were presenting themselves all the same on a regular basis to the world.

We were so close to breaking through with Seraphs Coal and Thinktank. Both bands must have been very close to receiving full radio support, but again without larger record companies pushing these bands, it was hard for the groups to step up to the next level. All the same, Christian bands were continuing to release quality records.

The Underground scene could be described as an indie movement. We were a scene that lacked radio support and large record labels. We were caught in the middle. It was not commercial US Christian music, and we did not fully fit the secular music scene either. For this reason these Underground bands were at a dead end and couldn't go any further. What held it up was a huge support network of fans. For a while the Christian music scene was huge across Australia in an indie way. The movement was never commercial, it was full on indie. The fans made it what it was.

Independent music is when a band does not come from a record label, or at least not from a major label. These bands are considered independent. There were actually a lot of indie bands present during this time in Australia. Independent movements are not completely uncommon. Groups of bands spring up sharing the same style of music or perhaps they have something to say, like on this occasion. We shared the same beliefs and there was definitely a live presentation style that unified us. Independent stuff is cool anyway! It was cool for so many reasons.

"I guess the old saying was true, divided we fall, so united me and you, united we stand tall." [STR, Divide and Fall] If anything we were not unified enough to come forward at the time and claim this was an independent movement. I think united we may have been able to stand tall. We all had rather separate identities as well. We had slightly different lyrical approaches and ways of expressing our faith that kept us from claiming unity. We never claimed to be a movement. It's only upon reflection that I have heard artists like Darren Reid from Embodiment 12:14 and Andrew Lang from Lessie Does talk about what went down. They described it to me as a movement of bands.

In some ways we were more unified than other independent movements going around. Bands would come together regularly in community and

support one another. Harold festivals became the most defining moment for us as a movement as such, as it fully unified us together. However we never ever presented ourselves to radio or to media as an independent movement, we simply all did our own thing. It's only now a few years down the track that artists are seeing perhaps the bigger picture of what was going on.

The advantage for independent bands is that no one was telling us what to do; no one was directing or changing the style of the bands. Everything was happening all very naturally and organically. It was very real music. Bands from the Underground had energy and life. It was music that was highly motivating and inspiring to many people. It was life giving music.

Edison was another high energy band from the Underground. They definitely fitted into the mould of the movement. That year Edison put out a quality release. *Last Year's Journal* was the title of Edison's follow up to their debut EP, *Blueprint Yesterday*. This new recording displayed both growth and maturity. The release was pushed nationwide through distribution in 2003. Edison were a band that continued to peak. They would build on each release. By this stage, Edison was one of the top Christian bands in the state and they also had a national profile that was building.

Thinktank were another band to do a release in 2003. Thinktank were putting most of their energy into Melbourne, by the time they came around to releasing their debut album. Melbourne was a focus for the band. They were concentrating mainly on the industry at this point. This meant a focus on radio and the Melbourne secular music scene. They actually did not place a huge effort into their Adelaide release, as the band was too stretched to do both. I think this was a good game plan for Thinktank. If you were going to crack it in the national secular music world, then Melbourne was a good place to do it! Most of the bands making it on a national level were coming out of Melbourne and Sydney.

Thinktank's debut album was titled *Rules for Revolution*. This was a watertight album, meaning that by this stage the band had fully refined their sound. The whole album has an emotive modern rock flavour. It's generally very up tempo and inspiring. The single, 'Braving the Day', was a real breakthrough for the band. This song fully elevated the group to have a national profile. By this stage Darren Thompson had a lot of recording experience and he knew what he was doing. Darren had learnt how to write a record and a hit single, that's for sure.

It was interesting to see Darren Thompson's approach to the whole release. There were a lot of people cheering them on as they received national radio play. I remember hearing their song on Triple J. I was chuffed for the band. I would not get out of the car until the song was finished! It was a good moment to hear the band going ahead with national radio play. Thinktank was well loved and one of the favourites in the scene. Lessie supported Thinktank at their Adelaide CD launch; it was actually one of our last shows.

Our next show would be our final concert. "It's funny, I'm saying funny things, I could never visualize the ending movie scene, and now the credits are rolling down, but you don't have to worry even though you're leaving the ground, I will always be waiting for you." [**Lessie Does**] Christ is always with us through our journeys. He is there in our movie. When the credits are rolling down I pray Jesus will be there waiting for me. Sometimes in life the end of one movie is only the start of another. This was definitely true for me.

This was Lessie's last showing on the big screen! Our final gig was at the Adelaide Uni Bar. It was our favourite venue in our home town. The room was made for bands. I had watched some cool shows go down in this room. There was always an amazing atmosphere at the Uni Bar. It was a special night to say goodbye to our friends and fans. As a band we were able to spend some precious time together in our favourite room jamming out our favourite songs! We were keen to go out with all the bells and whistles chiming to the max. Lessie Does gave it everything for one last show.

This is where it had all got going for us as a group. The release of *Place of Harmony* with Seraphs Coal was the true ignition point for our band. From that point onwards we knew we could do it with the support of the scene. Now things were finishing up in the same place in which it all began, it was very ironic. We stayed true to the scene and played with Mere Theory, Edison and Hummel in our final show.

The line up was all rock. Mere Theory were a classic little rock band that seemed very much to have their sound together. They were becoming a growingly popular band in the scene despite playing secular shows and being a secular band. They were a great group, really too good to be on first but it was a strong line up that night.

Edison were on next; again Edison was doing a lot of good things

around this time both in the Christian and secular music world, and Hummel were a favourite for Lessie! Our band selected groups that reflected our new rock position. As always, Lessie looked for a mix of secular bands to combine with the Underground scene. We never just played for the Underground; we played for everyone!

It's kind of a heavenly experience to play under lights sometimes. When you connect with the crowd, the music and all of the emotion on the night it is one of the most human experiences to be felt I think. Music rolls so much together! You're not just playing songs but you're in the music, you're connected with your band, with your friends and everyone else at the show. It's poetry in action. It's living poetry and it's in motion in time.

This is how it went down on that final night for me. I don't think it was by any means our best performance at all, but it was our most emotional, easily. Emotions plus music is such a beautiful thing. I often think this is when the angels come down and work through us on planet earth. Music is such a special thing as it allows us to connect with God; that is truly awesome!

I'm not entirely sure that Lessie fans would have noticed much of a change from punk music to rock as we played all our old classics anyway that night. I did hear a few reactions to the new CD. It disappointed a few of our punk fans, but then the rockers were happy. That was Lessie Does; we always had a bit of both going on. Lessie was the people's band. It was sad and emotional to finish up, but it was the best way to finish.

Lessie Does retired in March 2003.

Make This Life Count

.....

Break everything in me
That stops me from walking your path
Show me the things each day
That need to be changed in my life
Help me to be the man
That your plan
Has in store for me
Help me to get up
Every time that I fall
Short of victory
Make this life count
Rule my thoughts
Rule my mind
Holy Spirit define me
Remind me
Every second I'm alive
Let me see each face
As you look upon each one
With amazing grace
Amazing grace
How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost
But now am found
Was blind but now I see
Make this life
Make this life
Make this life count

ARTIST *Aaron Mabikafoal* ■ SONG *Make this Life Count*
BAND *Hometime* ■ RECORD *Bought with Blood* © 2004

Love and Hate

2004

*Some say, some say, we like your style,
it's alright alright, alright alright,
we like your style, others say, they say,
we don't like you at all, we don't like you,
Some say, we all like you, we all like you.*

Matthew Baker, *We all like you*
LESSIE DOES

WE ALL LIKE YOU by Lessie Does never made it onto a record, but the song explored an interesting theme that many of us experience. The song shares some insight into the battles that I was going through personally. I was aware that by being in a band some people are going to love you and some people are going to hate you.

I was directly confronted once by a man who said: "I hate Christians!" I cried and I was very emotional at this experience. It's hard to face the reality that some people hate Christians. I understand how people react strongly to music, people really fire up over it, the world goes crazy over music, but the reality is, it is still hard to deal with hate that is personally directed towards you.

Knowing that some people did not like me knocked my self esteem

around. Unfortunately I'm the type of person that cares too much about what other people think. Negative comments over a long period of time got to me. My song, 'We All Like You', shares the fact that there is love and hate in the world. It shares the battles that people go through. Jesus was also loved and hated by the world. He was put to death for His teachings.

Human error is to hate things. "Something tells me I really shouldn't hate so much, but everywhere I look I see so much hate. I hate the way I hate the way I hate things." [**Seraphs Coal**, *Human Error*] Hate is often hidden, but you can feel it. The force of hate is sometimes unseen, as it lies in the darkness. There is a lot to learn about Jesus through music. One thing to learn is that some people will hate you for writing Christian songs. There are many good things though that we can learn through the Underground bands.

Jesus teaches us love, the opposite of hate. Teaching others about Christian love is an important part of being in a band community. I have learnt a lot from Edison about Christian music. They are a band that had a large amount of insight to share. Edison expressed their music and artistic journey with God through the Underground interviews. They shared loving advice.

Both Matt and Rachel Ho were into emo rock and melodic music very early on in the piece, before it became very popular. These early influences helped shape Hone and later perhaps more so, Edison. Seraphs Coal and Thinktank were also key local influences on Matt and Rachel. These bands would share the journey with them.

Hone was very much an experimental art project for Matt and Rachel. The band explored creative song writing techniques. They certainly were not stuck in the conventional mould of things. Emo and melodic music became essential influences and elements to the development of Matt and Rachel's art and music. Hone explored art through their band.

God is an amazing creator. As Christians we also seek to create art. Rachel created and wrote a lot of the lyrics for both Hone and Edison. She kept a journal in which she used to express thoughts, feelings and creative writing. Then lyrics would of course have to fit into the melody of the songs. Matt Ho would also get involved by putting the words into the music. They never felt as if it was completely theirs alone. Matt was very much aware that God was involved in the creation process.

“This was God’s doing,” he said. “It is amazing to realize that God is very much a part of our creations. He is with us in all that we do.”

God was a part of Hone’s art.

It was important for Hone and Edison to be inspired by each member in the band. Edison described that excellence to them meant trying their best. You have to stick it out and rise above everything. It’s important to persist beyond what your current abilities are. You can find inspiration in achieving new ground above what you have already done. This may mean a new piece of equipment or a new song that’s better than anything you have ever done before. When you achieve those moments of progress, it can inspire each member of the band to go onto higher ground.

Edison was motivated to push their live shows to new levels. One thing about playing live is that you always find a song that you can really enjoy and get right into. ‘Goodbye No Returns’ was one of Rachel’s favourite Edison songs. The pure emotion felt at their last show was a special experience.

“It was like this song was written for our last show,” said Rachel.

Emotion and music can be a very powerful thing for an artist, but also for their fans. Matt’s favourite song was ‘Through My Eyes’. The crowd would always get into this song and sing the words. When the crowd reacts in some way to your music, it helps you to personally get into it more. The crowd inspires you and fills you with energy to perform for them; it’s like a chemical reaction that God has made between people and music.

Recording is different altogether, to playing live. There is a lot to learn. Edison shared some of their findings: “When you’re heading towards recording it is important that you prepare as much as you can. You need to put a lot of time aside and encourage each other. Grab a mentor if you can, someone who can help to advise you. Get together better equipment. Record lots of demos, otherwise you are just going on your live performances. Work on the songs as much as you can. Practice as often as you can and seek out opinions that you can trust. Don’t cut corners. Do not rush each stage. Work at things until you get it right before the band moves onto the next step in the recording journey. A good band ticks all the boxes.”

Edison thought that having some basic recording equipment really helps the whole pre-production process and that it takes time to learn a recording method that works; it’s very different from playing live.

Edison developed into a quality live band. They reached the level where

they were able to support their favourite international bands. It is a huge buzz to play with a band that you are way into. It's exciting to play their CD all week in your car and then rock up to a gig and play a show with them. It certainly is a good feeling. I remember experiencing this a few times with Lessie, with bands like Motor Ace and 28 Days. It gets you way pumped up for the weekend show. You have it on your mind all week. It's a cool experience. Edison certainly achieved the status of becoming a solid support band for international acts.

Not only did Edison play big support shows but they were also heavily involved in the Underground band scene. Watching these kids play with beanies on at the Underground was a favourite memory for Edison. Later they learned that this was actually Seraphs Coal. They would become one of Edison's favourite bands, along with STR and Thinktank. This first memory of seeing Seraphs will stay with Edison.

There was no such thing as a Christian scene when Matt and Rachel started out. There was nothing that they were aware of anyway. The Underground has provided them with their closest friends. People in Adelaide would all know that you were Christians because of the Underground network.

"There was nothing negative towards the band at the time in relation to our faith," said Matt and Rachel.

They did not feel hated. Edison however did receive one negative review from an interstate magazine, but they were happy that people had achieved some kind of reaction towards their music. In the Adelaide scene though it was normal to share Jesus; original Christian music has been very much a part of our recent history.

Band members from Seraphs Coal also discussed that they never got persecuted that much for their faith, well at least not to their face. I personally think this is because they were so full on; they were so punk. I mean what exactly could anyone say to Seraphs Coal to deter them from their faith. However they were persecuted in the Brisbane press. There were totally unbiased claims that because the band was Christian, they were totally homophobic and that they hated gay people. This story had been developed out of nothing; rather it was persecution against the band.

People can always criticize you I guess when you're putting your music out there.

“When our music is pointing the finger at people you always have three pointed back at yourself,” said Andre from Seraphs Coal.

It’s important to live it out, not just sing it out. As Christians we know the hope we have and we need to share it with others. We all fall short, but we have hope of salvation through Jesus.

People also reacted strongly to Embodiment 12:14. They were a well loved band and Embodiment had become known as one of the most respected Australian Christian Hardcore groups ever.

“We had some people love us and some people hate us,” said Darren.

I think that’s just the way it is with music. Big reactions generally mean you’re doing something right. It sometimes is better to have a big reaction than nothing at all. At least you know you have made people think about God for a moment. It’s disappointing that some people simply reject Christian music as religious, they often don’t get past this, and this blocks them from thinking about God at all. I’m glad that people did see God in Embodiment’s music; it’s a true testimony to what the band was on about. They were never overly religious; rather Embodiment 12:14 was a God-inspired thing!

Edison was another band that was definitely inspired by God. A real positive to come out of Edison was Rachel’s example to girls. Many girls in the scene were inspired by Rachel Ho. Being a girl in the community meant that Rachel from Edison was an important role model for many other Christian girls. “There just weren’t many girls in bands at the time,” said Rachel. “You have to become a lot stronger, have a thick skin and trust in God a lot more.” Rachel learnt the importance of forgiveness. She had to learn to deal with her emotions in a male-dominated scene. Rachel was very much an important member of the movement for that reason. She became a key female member and leader.

Almost all the groups were very male-dominated. I think this may have been something to do with the fast energy style of music, but I’m not completely sure though. There were always lots of girls who were into the bands, but there were not many female musicians. Unfortunately that’s how it was. This made Rachel Ho even more precious to the community. It was important for the girls to connect with her and also see what they could do. Rachel was inspirational to many girls, simply as a female Christian artist.

I would say that Lessie Does had perhaps a 50% crowd base of females.

These girls played a big part in the community. The scene was tremendously social. A night out to the bands was truly a fun experience. The whole community would catch up and listen to music. Christian music was a celebrative culture. We would come together and celebrate Jesus, the music and one another as friends. I think a band night was simply another form of Christian fellowship. The girls' support to us and to the scene was invaluable.

For me personally, love from Jesus comes in the form of encouragement from our brothers and sisters in Christ. A friend of Lessie Does, Candice Bawden was a regular attendee at our shows and she used to catch quite a few bands in the scene. I always found her inspirational to me personally. She was so alive. She enjoyed the music so much; she was extremely passionate about Christian music. Candice was always giving genuine compliments to our band. She had energy. Many girls like Candice would inspire the band and keep us going. When you see or hear of people into Christian music it gives you a good kick along.

Candice used to rock out. She loved 'She Rock', a Lessie song. I think the song was practically written for her, because Candice rocks! She liked to rock. It's amazing how important encouragement and love is to one another. It helps everyone to feed off each other's energy. Encouragement is so vitally important to us as humans. It lifts us up and helps us, and some of these kind words stay with us for a long time. Encouragement by Candice inspired me personally on my musical journey.

Rachel from Edison was not only an encourager to us but she was also a band-leader. She used to do the song selection and she would write out and organise the band's set lists. It's important for bands to have good leaders, it helps guide and direct you more efficiently. Leadership within the band is actually a big issue. Too many leaders can create problems. In a way as a leader you really are acting as a servant for the band. Rachel was a trusted leader, and she led Edison well.

Jesus was also a servant to His disciples, He washed their feet so that they would know the depth of His love that He had for them. We are to love one another. When we lead we are also called to serve. Loving others is the greatest command that Jesus gives us as His followers. In being a band leader, we are a servant to our friends and to the group members.

There are lots of lessons to be learnt in a band as leaders and as group

members. Advice in the scene is precious for Christians. Edison talked about what they had learnt in the industry: “Be honest with each other. Be open. Love each other like family. Stick up for your friends. Have a strong core group. Make God central to your band. Have visions and dreams that you can aim towards and achieve. Share them together. Believe in your goals and stay true to what you believe. Search for the truth. Love what you are doing. Be sincere in all that you do and be careful of some of the world’s carrots. Be true to your own expression. Find identity in your own group. Seek out advice and help others to learn what you have learnt.”

Often there is not much difference between a world band and a Christian band musically. In fact the music should be the same. Perhaps our reasons and motivations behind what we do maybe different.

“It’s our message that is the main difference,” said Edison. “It’s important to have a humble attitude to rock and roll as Christians. We need to point straight up to Jesus. We truly are the vehicles for many people to meet God. It’s important to be a shining light in this world.”

It’s really helpful to be a part of the Christian scene if you can. You have to be in God’s community as much as possible. This gives you strength to go out into the world. It’s important to allow Jesus to shine through what you are doing.

Edison’s success shone out of a desire to be sincere in all that they did.

“We did what we loved,” he said.

You have to be a little bit different to everyone else, but not too different. It’s important to be passionate.

“We did not aspire to be as big as Seraphs Coal or anything like that. We knew we would never be that big; we just did what we loved doing,” said Matt Ho.

The band matured as songwriters as they journeyed along. Hone was a bit more of an art experiment, whereas Edison sought to meet people where they were at, and this led to the band’s success.

Just as Edison was peaking, the band decided to call it a day as Joshua was moving to Canada. This was yet another Christian band finishing up as they were at the top of their game. Matt and Rachel from Edison were not finished yet though; this was not the end of their musical story.

They would both progress onto further projects together.

Although many Underground bands were finishing up around this

time, Andrew Lang from Lessie Does continued on with music. Andrew was now in a strong Christian band called Wone. Andrew said that they started out as a bunch of friends and then decided to get a band together while they were on a Christian camp. Wone had got to know each other through Lutheran church circles. The band then bonded well.

Like many other young Christian artists, Woff from Wone felt that Christian music was a little tame early on. It was not until the Underground music movement started that he became excited about Christian music again. This was a common thought progression for hundreds of Christian artists in Adelaide at the time. This state of affairs got people fired up about music. Everyone wanted to be a part of it. Everyone now had an opportunity to have a voice. Woff wanted to be a part of this adventure. This led him to start up a band with Andrew Lang.

Wone went through several lineup changes before they settled down as a four-piece rock outfit. I don't think Andrew actually even started out as lead singer of Wone while he was still in Lessie Does, but as the band evolved Andrew eventually became the lead singer of the group. When Lessie finished, the band began to take things more seriously. Wone had now fully formed and things were beginning to take shape for the band.

The band Wone could be described as modern rockers although they would be the first to admit that it's very hard to achieve an original sound these days. The band focused on having driving guitars and a big rock sound. Wone aimed to bring a wall of music to the table. They specialized in classic timeless rock music. When you hear the riffs and guitar hooks it's easy to imagine them on the big stage.

Wone aspired to great things. Out of these dreams came a tour to the US. The band became well known for long car trips and rock and roll tours, but this trip to the US was a particularly big one for the band. Most of the time, the group struggled for money. However they had the attitude that it did not matter how big or small the shows were, as long as people felt encouraged by God they knew they were on the right track. A tour to the US taught Wone a lot about being a Christian artist.

One memorable show was at a US camp, called Lake Wapogasset. It was probably one of the most memorable shows the band ever did. The amps the band had to use were so small you could place them into your shoes. The room was practically a tin shed, which made for terrible acoustics,

and to top it all off, the PA sound system was terrible. However the band was fully aware that this is how God works from time to time. God left the band with a story to tell and a US road trip they would never forget. Camaraderie is something special that grows in a band especially after a journey around the US. The band played some good shows but its Lake Wapogasset that they remember and talk about fondly. It was a memorable tour to the US for Wone.

Lang talked about the *Live Again* EP with me, which was released in 2004. He shared that it's easy to lose yourself in the world. If you don't have your eyes on Jesus, then you can be taken off the path. Advertising and marketing pleasures do not feed the soul. It is God that makes us whole. Materialism in the Western world is massive. God is calling us out of that. We are to be free to worship Him.

"We are free through God to live again," Andrew said.

The single, *Live Again*, reveals Andrew's faith: "In asking all these questions, I'm searching for all the answers, you see, the truth is what I seek, still I feel that I'm under pressure, about to lose composure, but I won't swallow all the lies I'm told." Andrew is a person able to look deeper and past the lies of the world; he looks for God's truth. It's something that I could identify with as I was again searching for God's truth myself. "I'm drawn to the supernatural, the realm above the lateral, is where I find the peace I need." Andrew finds peace in God's spiritual world. He calls upon God to heal him and lift him up. He desires to live again with God.

Lang continued by sharing with me the *Reconciled* EP, which was recorded later that year in December 2004. The main message that Andrew wanted to present to people was that God has reconciled us and forgiven humans from our sins. We are reconciled through Christ. Jesus has brought us back into relationship with God. By the blood of Jesus we are reconciled.

Wone had quickly produced another classic little single and by this stage they were well on the way to recording their debut album.

The more I explored Christian lyrics and music from bands like Wone, the more I found wisdom in their words. Underground bands have so much experience to share with people. It's important we pass on what we have learnt about Jesus in order to help future generations. The bands were able to teach me what they had learnt through interviews, but they also taught me through their music. I believe Jesus is in the music. There is a

lot we can learn about Jesus through Christian records in general, but also more specifically through the Underground bands.

Jesus was watching us the whole time. He saw all the bands playing shows, releasing CDs and writing lyrics. He watched our triumphs and He saw us in need of love and protection. He knows our successes and our failures. "I know everything about you, I know everything you do, when you sit and when you rise, I see it all now through your eyes, everything you do, I know all that's in your head, I know when you're seeing red." [WayBackWhen, *No Shadow*]

Jesus knows us well. He is watching over humans every day and He is with us when we experience love and hate. Jesus was a teacher of love and yet He also experienced hate from the world. I know He sees us and truly understands our spiritual battles!

Human Error

.....

Something tells me I really shouldn't hate so much,
 But everywhere I look I'm seeing so much hate,
 I hate the way, I hate the way I hate things
 Responsibility sometimes just seems far too much to bear
 There's nothing left to say about my apathy,
 It really gets the better of me,
 I'm trapped in my own frame of mind,
 It seems I've drifted far too far from God,
 My God the God who gives me life,
 He picks me up and draws me to His side,
 Jesus hears my cries,
 My God delivers me the hate I felt towards an ill humanity
 Dissolves in hope that one day
 They might feel as free as me
 There's nothing left to say about my apathy,
 It's still hard but He helps me see the reason
 Functions meant to be is to make our lives complete fallen flesh
 We want to hate we want to live our lives apart from God but
 When we can't we realise that apathy is all we've got to go by.

ARTIST *Seraphs Coal* ■ BAND *Seraphs Coal*
 SONG *Human Error* ■ RECORD *Don't Mind If I Don't, EP* © 1998

Mental Health and Rock'n'Roll

.....

2004

*Did you ever feel that you weren't in control?
Did you ever run from the things that you know?
Did you ever wonder why there were lies?
It's because of the forces controlling over our lives,
spiritual war is over me.*

Hone, Receiver
HONE

I HAD DEALT with mental health issues before in my life. I struggled to play some songs with Lessie Does towards the end of our band's journey. I would have trouble remembering songs, even though I had known them and played them for years. I also had increasing difficulties with timing. I was never able to communicate what I was going through, however the band members of course picked up on my performance going down. This led to a great deal of frustration. Andrew was very patient with me, but at times it pushed him to his limits and then some. He found it hard to tolerate. I was not a natural musician; so mental health issues made things even harder for me, even so I managed to hang in there right until the end.

I kept going, but our performances were starting to suffer. With Jeremy on bass and me struggling on guitar, we knew that Lessie was not the same band and I think we were all looking for new life challenges anyway. The end came at a good time for me because of my health. I was so happy that I had made it all the way through the band's adventure! It was quite an achievement considering what my body and mind were going through at the time.

It might seem strange, but I could never put a finger on what was wrong with me. I seemed to be getting what I would call micro injuries all the time. In general my health was struggling, but I never could establish what was going on. It is true that in the dark world of mental illness, there are lots of related problems that seem to come along with it. Despite these issues I was never really diagnosed with anything during my Lessie Does days. I was still functioning, although cognitively I was pushing harder to stay in the game. I remember having to change some of my strumming patterns to be able to play along with the band.

Lessie Does had finished up and I was moving into a new phase of my life. As a result of my personal circumstances I became fully aware that I was not able to control my future anymore. My life was spinning out of control in many ways due to my poor physical and mental health. Work, band life and social life became far more difficult for me during this period of time.

However, my poor health actually brought me back to God. I had run from Him for too long, I had run from all the things that I knew were to be true. Lies had stopped me from living the life that God had called me to have. I had made too many excuses to myself about why I was not following God and why I was not personally living closer to Jesus.

Did you ever wonder why there are lies in this world? Sometimes it's because evil forces and evil people push us and trap us. Sometimes we lie because we are in sin. There are clearly forces over our lives. There is spiritual war over us. Jesus desires to call us out of all of this trouble; He washes us clean and calls us to be His children of God.

Do you think the forces of good and evil fight over our salvation? I think they are at war over our lives. This is how God has explained this time of darkness in my life to me. He has communicated that Christ is the way, the truth and the life. The lies of the world and the lies of evil forces are washed away by God's truth.

“A billion voices won’t be stopped, who could hold them in? This future battle will be fought, watch as it begins. [**Thinktank**, *The Accolades of Man*] I believe God and all of His angels are fighting over us. They fight to save us. They fight to save the Christians! I like to picture all of God’s angels and armies, fighting to save the sinner and bringing them back into God’s family, for I was that lost sheep in a dark place.

Salvation is a mission and Jesus was fighting to save me. He was calling me back to love and community. Despite being in Lessie Does I had been out of the church for six years. Through this time Christian friends were always with me, but I lacked the full support of the body of Christ. Church leaders had questioned whether I was a Christian at all, although I think my close friends knew that I always had a faith, it was only that my life was pretty mixed up.

I could never have visualized this scene from my life. Lessie Does had finished up and I was overseas in London in 2004 doing some work as a PE teacher. I met up with a couple of Australian teaching friends who took me to church. This was the only time I made it to church whilst I was overseas. The pastor got to me in a big way. I was crying in church, at least on the inside anyway. I could never cry anymore. My heart was somewhat hardened towards God.

I was in a very numb state most of the time, in order to block out the pain that I was going through emotionally. I loved God’s creation and I loved Christians, but I was not following Him with all my heart. On this day however, I followed His call and went down the front of the church. The Pastor had really spoken directly to me. I felt God speaking through him. Going down the front of the church is something that I would never normally do, but I was getting desperate. It was a start, but I really needed salvation, not just prayer in this movie scene!

I needed to actually feel God and discover salvation personally for myself. It had to be all very real, in order for me to follow Jesus with all my heart. Yet this was the beginning of me hearing God communicate to me once again. I felt as if the Pastor was talking directly to me. The message went straight to my heart and soul.

This experience of Yahweh was all coinciding with poor health. I was beginning to suffer badly from mental health issues. I then flew home from London to Adelaide and I returned to my home church. I felt very

much like the lost orphan coming back to Australia, but I was happy to be home once again.

A return to my spiritual family was simply an indication that I was walking with Jesus much closer. Jesus was bringing me back to a childhood faith. You would expect a few questions from family and friends after returning from an overseas adventure where you were supposed to be away for the whole year. I had planned to work half the year in London and then travel around the world, but things did not work out that way. It was a bit embarrassing to face up to all of this. It was like twenty questions for the first few months from most people I saw. It was a bit hard to deal with this but I did not care at all as I was home, and that's where I needed to be, home with family and friends. I started attending church more and more regularly at that point. I don't actually think that church attendance is everything; it's more that my relationship with God was being restored.

I had fallen over metaphorically speaking, physically, mentally, socially and emotionally. I largely spent the rest of 2004 predominately in my home writing original world poetry based music. I was way into emotional lyrics and I was expressing how I was feeling. I chucked all these songs out in the end, some of them were quite good, but they were sad, it was a sad time, and I was happy to be moving on. I just remember the central theme of falling over. I'm falling over, I'm falling over. I had fallen over. "Broken I'm falling down, broken I'm falling into place, broken I'm down, falling, broken, I'm broken." [**Antiskeptic**, *Clear to Pass*] I can strongly relate to this song by Antiskeptic as it very much describes what I was expressing and writing about in 2004.

I tried to start up a band with Jeremy Owen but I wasn't well enough to be able to handle it. On the whole, I was not well enough to return to work either that year. I did manage to do a short stint of teaching in the Adelaide CBD for a period of five weeks. I was living with an old school friend called Dale Gosden at the time. He was training to be a Lutheran Pastor at Uni. Dale was writing and singing some worship songs to me occasionally. He had encouraged me to change my music focus from rock and roll to worship, not through any words, but simply through his example. My health crashed again, a lot more seriously this time and I returned home to my family in the Adelaide Hills.

My mental health was suffering severely at this stage. I went to hospital

in August 2004. When I was in hospital I was diagnosed with psychosis and schizophrenia. I actually had no idea of what was happening to me in hospital at the time. I could never have imagined the magnitude of what I was about to go through. People who have psychosis and schizophrenia often report hearing voices and that was true for me.

My first reaction in hospital was to keep it all inside of me; I was kind of in a frozen state of shock. I was however keen to escape hospital. I spent most of my days going for walks to get out of the ward. I would walk to the courtyard or out to the oval. Hospital was a very hard environment to be in; watching others who were going through similar experiences is difficult to witness at first.

The first psychiatrist recommended a long hospital stay. He was quite certain this was the best approach. My mother flipped out straight away at the suggestion and asked for another opinion. I was so lucky to have her there at the time otherwise I would simply have accepted it. The second psychiatrist recommended a couple of days in hospital, followed up by family therapy. Family therapy is now recognized as one of the best environments for people with mental health conditions.

I returned home, but the worst was not over. I was now hearing voices that would affect my outward behaviour. Down the track these voices would make me angry. This angry emotion was probably a better reaction than simply being frozen; it was important for me to show what was going on inwardly, rather than not being able to do anything about it.

Now I had to learn how to deal with this anger. At first I was like a little angry kid at what I was going through. I would get so angry and I would not be able to control it. This meant I would break a few things around the house. It was hard for me to understand what I was going through let alone anyone else in my family. I broke an outdoor table, a set of golf clubs, and I whacked a whole heap of tennis balls off the property with my tennis racquet. I was angry and I could not control it. I had to find a better way of getting all my energy out.

I also found this experience and mental condition to be very spiritual in nature. I came to a point where I feared my life. I became desperate for salvation. "Hold to belief, frailty is not your only choice, your sight restored by healing hands could you believe?" [**Thinktank**, *Of Childhood Kings*] Could I believe in Jesus against my frailty and poor health? I was

pacing around the room with the Bible open. Flicking through the pages, I was searching for salvation and then bang it hit me as Jesus opened my eyes to the scriptures.

"I believe in Jesus because I have heard Him myself." I questioned where have I heard Jesus? I had heard Him through creation, through people and through the Bible. I was hearing Him all the time. I knew that I had heard Jesus throughout my life. I now believe in Jesus because I have heard Him myself. "And though you fear this night, I still believe the limit of your strength precedes the chance to make a choice, it's in your hands could you believe." [**Thinktank**, *As Trees Walking*]

I could believe, I had been given another chance to believe in Jesus and with all my being I would take this chance. My limited strength was Jesus' opportunity to save me.

"Open your eyes and just believe, open your eyes and just receive, open your eyes and just believe, open your eyes and you will see." [**Hometime**, *Bought with Blood*] Belief was the key for me; once I knew that I had heard Jesus myself, I had belief. My eyes were open to seeing and hearing Jesus again. Belief was actually the point that was blocking me. The rest of salvation I knew. "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." [John 3:16] If I died I now knew that I had found salvation. In London I was broken and fallen, now I was saved!

Salvation was a huge spiritual victory, but it was not the end of my mental illness. I would have to learn how to live with this condition. I had good days and bad days. Some days were very hard mentally, but I would find moments of happiness, often only moments during those first few years of mental illness. I would slowly get used to hearing constant voices. It is literally another world reality to learn to live with. It has made me much more aware of my spiritual walk with Jesus. You learn to value every good input coming into your life. The Underground music was definitely a good input. It helped me many times. It has lifted me up and encouraged me over and over again.

One group that was still encouraging me and other fans around this time was STR. The band had so much momentum building after they released a single titled, *How to Live Today*. STR showed everyone that not only could they write a solid song, but that now they could write a good

single as well. I remember hearing that so many people were into them around that time. There was such a good vibe going around for the band. I was personally sure that they were about to break onto the national scene in a big way. Everything was building nicely for the band. STR was a group that was slow to release material yet they seemed to leave everyone wanting a CD in their hands.

They were gearing up for the release of their debut album, when they lost their bass player to another band. It was a tragedy at the time from a momentum perspective. This slowed the whole recording process down almost to a halt. It took a big effort to get this new album going again, the band went through a real journey. STR was forced to go through a line up change as they progressed on their way to recording.

Their fans were left questioning, what was going on? Will the band still be able to get their album out? A lot of fans actually thought that STR had broken up. The band had to explain that they were just stuck for a while. Everyone would have to wait a bit longer for the new STR record. Before long the band was motoring again with a new bass player. The group soon went into the studio to record *Hopes for Hire*, their debut album. They spent six weeks in 2004 in a small cabin recording their record.

Finally it was completed. They had done it! STR had an album coming out. The band started to demo their music in 2003. It was a two-year process to record the album. They spent three weeks recording and three weeks mixing. The band had to regain a lot of momentum again after they had completed their record. It was now time to get out and do some more shows to support their new CD. STR fans are loyal and patient, they were there waiting all along. The consensus was that the album was well worth hanging around for.

By 2004 the Underground band scene continued to close down, leaving only a few prominent bands. WayBackWhen were always a special band to Lessie Does as several members of the band were directly related to Lessie. Tim Owen was Jeremy's brother and Nathan Purdie was my brother in law. Nathan was married to my sister Julie. Tim Owen also played the drums, like Jeremy; they both belong to a very talented musical family. Tim was just as good as Jeremy on the drums, he was a solid performer and Nathan Purdie played the bass and was the lead singer for WayBackWhen. For me, WayBackWhen were one of the most underexposed bands for the amount

of talent they had. I still hold the band in high regard. With more exposure WayBackWhen could have done anything.

They played mainly rock and punk tunes, but they had quite a unique sound. Nathan has a very original vocal style. WayBackWhen were quite a strong Christian band; they had some excellent Christian lyrics. “You carry me, I am yours and I have this certainty, that I belong and that you will never leave, I am yours and I have this certainty, that I belong, you are everything to me, to me, everything to, you know you’re everything. You know you are.” God is everything to a Christian. Jeremy Brown and Nathan Purdie expressed the fullness of their faith through track four, ‘Everything To’; this tune came off the *All These Times* EP. This song was on their second record and was released in 2004. WayBackWhen were clearly quite a strong Christian band.

I think Nathan Purdie is an exceptional singer. The band had a good sound. They recorded their second EP at Soundhouse Studios. They were a band that did all the right things, but never got the breaks they deserved. They were developing as the scene was going down. I regret not helping the band out more. It would have been good to play a few more Lessie and WayBackWhen shows together; but we never really connected that much, which was a bit stupid. We were both too busy doing our own thing, when we should have been helping each other out more.

WayBackWhen actually played more shows at the Underground than Lessie Does. Lessie was playing in the secular scene, while WayBackWhen played more at the Underground, therefore our paths did not actually cross that much. However I think young bands can learn from this. It’s very important to support your friend’s bands as much as you can. This may be by wearing their band t-shirt or playing gigs together. It’s good to learn from mistakes, as well as your wins!

My favourite ever WayBackWhen show was actually their final gig. It was hard for me to go out at that stage with mental health problems. I did not like going to pubs anymore, I simply found this too much, so a house party was a special gig for me and being their last show this made things even more special.

Similar to Lessie the band’s home base was at the Bellevue Heights Baptist Church. They were even more church based than us, so this was a fitting suburb for them to do their final show in. WayBackWhen played at

Tim Owen's house, which was located in the neighbourhood. There was a large gathering. It felt very natural for me to return back to a house party as this was where things had started out for all of us.

WayBackWhen started to play while the garage door opened up. The band presented themselves in a normal house party style, except there was a smoke machine and a strobe light pumping away. The band had a full lighting show. It was a cool gig and everyone was way into them. WayBackWhen played a memorable last show. It was a very natural way to finish up!

Each band added to the picture of the Underground. WayBackWhen were very genuine characters, they were real people. They never put a false pretence up, they were who they were. They simply projected Jesus in what they did. WayBackWhen were never a band that came with ego or attitude, they were gentle people. WayBackWhen added sincerity to the Underground.

They were the first Underground band that I would gravitate to when I was unwell. I had completely lost trust in the whole world and I could not handle listening to world music for a time. I needed to hear music from my friends to help build me up again. Its funny how one thing leads to another; WayBackWhen CDs were the first Underground recordings that I would fully get into after Seraphs Coal. I had borrowed the WayBackWhen CD off my brother. The only other CD that I ever owned was the *Don't Mind If I Don't* EP by Seraphs Coal, so it had been a while between records, for that was back in 1998. I was getting into WayBackWhen music just as the band was finishing off. It was this encounter that got me further interested in the indie scene again. Their records would further inspire me to get more into all of the Underground band recordings.

The Underground music helped me in a huge way during my mental health battles. I was no longer in a band, or well enough to start up something new, I was simply now a collector of the Underground Christian music scene. I was more a follower you could say. I was a follower of Jesus. "In pursuit of truth I found a road worth walking down." [**Hometime**, *Long for You*]

I felt very much that I was now walking with Jesus, even though I know in hindsight that He never left me. Jesus and His angels were clearly with me the whole time. Christian friends were walking with me through mental health issues and rock and roll.

Receiver

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Did you ever feel that you weren't in control?
Did you ever run from the things that you know?
Did you ever wonder why there were the lies?
It's because of the forces controlling over our lives
Spiritual war is over me,
Spiritual war is over me
Can't let this bring us down
Scrape my skin,
Renew us now
What is the way out?
He is the answer
What is the way out?
He is the answer
Spiritual war is over me,
Spiritual war is over me
Spiritual war is over me,
Spiritual war is over me

ARTIST *Music and Words by Hone* ■ BAND *Hone*
SONG *Receiver* ■ RECORD *Hone, EP* © 1999

Records and Messages

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2005

*In asking all these questions
I'm searching for the answers you see,
the truth is what I seek.*

Andrew Lang, *Live Again*
WONE

BY 2005 the main thrust of the Underground scene was over. Still STR, Embodiment 12:14, Hometime, and Wone were all doing excellent shows, as were several other bands. These groups continued to put out some exceptionally good records and messages. There was not the same amount of Christian bands around anymore, but all the same the scene had some quality left in it.

In February 2005 I had returned to part time teaching. Again I tried to start up a band with Jeremy, but I couldn't handle the load due to work commitments and personal health problems. I would have to learn how to become a follower of the Underground scene rather than a band member. Teaching with mental health problems was the hardest thing that I have ever done on this earth. I was emotional most of the time, tired and worn out! I found it very difficult compromising my teaching. The reality of

what I was able to achieve was difficult to handle. In a lot of ways I should never have been working; however there were some positive outcomes.

Through teaching I did learn that working could help to give me a positive focus. When I had nothing to do and no direction at all then things were actually a lot worse for me. It's no wonder that cognitive behaviour therapy is one of the leading methods for mental health. Anything cognitive helps pull up your thinking and behaviour. You crawl your way up! You can slowly develop things, but you have to work harder than normal to get to a high standard in something, but you can get there.

After finding salvation again as an adult, I now looked to continue to strengthen my relationship with Jesus. I had never been baptised, for I always made it far too big a deal. I felt too buried in sin to be baptised. At the same time I was over not being fully committed to God, it had cost me a lot of hurt and pain. I got close to being baptised on a Christian camp once, and friend Dale Gosden had talked it over with me during my stay with him. I was close but never there. After I expressed my poor health with my sister Julie she said: "You better get baptised then" and that was it.

As I prepared to be baptised in 2005 I switched to all Christian worship music for a period of time. I borrowed a whole stack of records from my sister Julie while she went away overseas for the year. Finally I had Christian worship music washing over me again. It had been a good seven years for me away from any Christian worship music, which is very different from having Lessie Does stuff and Underground music.

During the lead up to my baptism I was lovingly given the church Bible verse again several times by people who were encouraging me. The church verse is from Isaiah 40: 30-31: "Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." I could not believe how much this verse applied to my life at the time. I was tired and weary and I had definitely stumbled and fallen. I was placing my hope in the Lord for a recovery this time round. "Oh my God, I can't believe, you've got me running now, I'm desperate for you." [**Antiskeptic**, *Running Now*] I could not believe it, God had me running again for Him and much more directly now than ever before.

I started writing worship music. I wrote several songs before I used

the church verse to write a song. This song was clearly the best one I had written for a long while. I always seem to start with the creative side of things before I work on the logical, that's just how I think. Once I had the creative song formed I worked on my testimony. I shared my testimony with the church and I was baptised. It was a simple message of salvation. "Jesus took my sin away and now I can live again." [**Seraphs Coal**, *Each Day*] Friends, Dale Gosden from school and Jeremy Owen from Lessie Does, sang the church verse for me. This baptism song in 2005 was the start of me writing over a hundred worship songs.

I found truth in Jesus again. I had been searching for identity for years and now I found it in Jesus. "He cleanses us completely from guilt and shame and sin." [**Seraphs Coal**, *Hypocerase*] Jesus had washed away my guilt and sin. I had found identity in Him. I finally was a Christian artist who was writing Christian worship songs. I was enjoying worshipping God on the porch. It was back to basics for me. No longer was there a crowd or any lights, it was simply time to worship God on the porch.

After being baptised I wanted to follow Jesus full on, 100% Jesus freak style. It's funny because my first reaction to DC talks Jesus freak song was almost a feeling of embarrassment. I was embarrassed about being a Christian in the world, in the mid 90s. I was not completely sure that I wanted to be a Jesus freak. Now I was totally aware that I was a Jesus freak myself. I was committed to Him. It's not like Jesus had not used me all my life anyway, He had. Jesus had used my band Lessie Does a lot. It's just now things were much more official for me personally. I had been a follower of Jesus publicly for a long time, but now I was anointed with the Holy Spirit. 'What joy to be called a child of God and how I long to be with Him each day.' [**Seraphs Coal**, *Each Day*] It was a joyous occasion for me to make this decision and be baptised. I was now happy to be a Jesus freak.

Later in 2005 I got into Underground records in a much bigger way than I had ever done before. I was way into worship music for a good period, but I found myself missing rock music. I missed the high energy and adrenalin side of things. I did not want to return to where I was, so I began searching through my record collection. I started getting into Underground bands again; it was back to WayBackWhen; for they had become a favourite band for me towards the end of their existence. However this time I did not stop there, my brother Luke actually had a much better Underground

CD collection than I did, so I would borrow a few records off him. This music became a lifeline for me during my darkest hours of mental illness.

Through this music I became passionate about the whole Underground story. Back in 2003 I had become angry and frustrated about the Christian music scene and the block that the Underground bands faced when trying to go national. At the same time however I had felt powerless to do anything about it. Now that I was back into Underground bands, I was looking for something proactive to do for the scene. I felt that a documentary would be something that I could do to give back to the Underground after all the community had done for me.

I had no experience in film at all, apart from playing around with video cameras. The idea of making a documentary would have stopped there all together if it was not for Gavin Blieschke. I met Gavin through church. He agreed to help me interview the Underground bands. He is an experienced man in the film industry. Gavin worked as a freelance film and media specialist. Through his dedicated help I was able to interview several of the Underground bands.

During this time of teaching I did manage to interview five different bands and the management from the Underground Christian music venue. It was about the only thing I managed to do outside of teaching and getting baptised. I planned to make a documentary on the venue but the project got far too big for me at the time. Health issues prevented me from completing the documentary. However interviewing the bands helped me to collect CDs, posters and stories from the movement. I had always kept a lot of material from Lessie Does but now I had a growing interest in what happened and what exactly went down during this chapter of Australian Christian music. I started to see the bigger picture of what God had done through our records and messages.

STR had another record and message for the world that was soon to be released in 2005. The band described their album *Hopes for Hire* as their best work ever. They combined a lot of skate punk and some emo and hardcore influences, plus some pop punk as well. They believed that this record had something for everyone on it, and it does. *Hopes for Hire* is very different from the band's first EP. The first EP for me had a more unified sound. The album however is much more complex in that there is evidence of many styles rolled into one record. You could never box this

album up and say it sounds like one particular band, there's way too much in it for that. I think all the different styles work well together.

There are a lot of really cool melodies on *Hopes for Hire*. What the band was doing was actually very trendy around the release date, which worked out well for STR. It's not like the band was reinventing itself; it's just that what they had been doing for the last six years was very popular once again. The band's focus was actually never to impress the record labels; rather everything the band did was for the kids. STR was doing things for the right reason. They were definitely not a commercial group, STR were genuine punk rockers!

The band sent out another strong Christian message to people with their debut album, *Hopes for Hire*. The lyrics to track eight, 'STR Wake up Call', reveal a desperate plea for people to wake up to themselves: "Friends will come and friends will go, but this one's going to let you know, that I think you should wake up. Can you wake up? Wake up to yourself." Too often we're asleep to what is going on in the world. We need a wakeup call from time to time, and as Christians we need to wake people up to the reality of Jesus and what He has done for us.

STR is sharing their faith a little more gently on this album. For this reason it works well as good outreach punk rock music. STR stays true to their faith, but the band was now able to share their faith a bit less harshly, or blatantly may be a better word. They developed a few more niceties with the way they expressed their lyrics on *Hopes for Hire*.

STR launched *Hopes for Hire* at the Adelaide Uni Bar on Saturday, February 12 2005 with Stolen Youth, Chrysolite, Wendy Icon and Short Term Gain. The band planned to maintain a fun approach to what they were doing with the release.

"It's important to keep fun as a focus, rather than get too caught up in the success side of things," STR said.

If you're having fun then you're going to keep on going enjoying punk rock music, this was certainly STR's central aim. STR always had the ability to play lots of shows. This allowed the band to promote their releases. The CD launch went well from all reports.

STR played some amazing shows in their time as a band together. They toured New Zealand on their Thongcore tour in the year 2000. During this time STR did some amazing gigs. Can you imagine a better way to

see the world? What a beautiful place and a beautiful setting for a festival of live music.

The band also made appearances at several Australian festivals. STR was playing last at the end of a large show when they caught a crowd of over 3,000 people. It's an amazing feeling when you play in front of a big crowd. The adrenalin can pump you up for a long time. STR was one of those bands that could get a crowd really pumped up. It's not every day you get a crowd of 3,000 people walk up to your stage and go berserk when you're a little band out of Adelaide. It's something that remains with STR and will always stand out as a favourite show.

Why are we doing this is a good question to ask ourselves? Why play Christian punk rock? You need to know what you're on about as a band when you're playing around, whether that's in the national scene or just the local music industry. Music is social, political, emotional, physical and personal. It's easy to drift along, but you can make a strong impact on the scene if you're prepared to think through all your motives and beliefs. People are interested in what Christian bands have to say.

STR's band made a concerted effort to focus on having fun and enjoying their music rather than put the focus on radio play and commercial success. Despite this fun approach it remained vitally important for STR to express their beliefs: "The actual dream can become pointless in music, so it's more important to have good motives. Too many aspirations can kill the fun of it. It's vital to have the right focus when you're doing Christian music. The real reason we should be doing this ministry is to have a good influence on people. Jesus should be at the centre of all we do in music. If we take the time and focus on every aspect of what it means to be in a Christian band, then we can further establish our ministry through Jesus."

When the scene went down, STR was left to represent Christian punk. STR was one of the last bands standing in the movement. They were always a few years younger than the rest of us, so they had some quality punk rock left in them. STR could be described as energy balls when it came to gigging. It seemed though they were now playing to a very different crowd.

"There were always new people coming to shows," STR said.

There was a whole new generation coming through, which is not surprising; they had outlived the old scene. STR was moving on with a new group of kids. Although in saying this they were a band with a whole

heap of loyal fans that kept true to them right until the very end.

It would be easy to underestimate how much STR influenced the youth of the day in Australia. They were a clear favourite for many kids. For example there was a band up the east coast of Australia that named themselves Nevertheless, after an STR song. They clearly connected with the culture of the time. STR could be described as role models for the kids. Heaps and heaps of crew were into them. The band declared that it would have been nice if there was more depth at the time, but this is just how it was towards the end of the movement. There were a lot less bands left playing. When you're the main Christian punk band left in the scene you need help from new up and coming Christian bands. Due to this absence STR needed to play with a lot of secular bands and for this reason the band influenced not only Christians, but also the wider secular punk world.

STR decided to go out on a strong note while their final release was still peaking. The band finished up in October 2005 at the Fowlers venue. Embodiment 12:14 supported STR that night. It was another classic show from a couple of bands that grew out of the Underground. From humble beginnings these bands rocked out the world. STR felt that they had run their course; at that point they had been together for eight years. They had done so many cool things and they were looking to go out on a strong note. STR will be remembered as one of the premier Christian punk rock bands in the state and possibly Australia wide. They certainly made a huge impact on the Underground and secular music world.

Hometime were another band left standing in the Underground in 2005. Hometime had hooked up with Youth Alive representative Scott Hawkins. Youth Alive organise a lot of large youth outreach events in South Australia. Through Scott Hawkins the band would complete many tours. Hometime enjoyed the country tours of South Australia.

"We saw lots of kids come to the meetings and get saved," said Aaron from Hometime. "Kids would really listen to you if you had cool tunes." Youth Alive provided Hometime with the opportunity to reach the youth.

Not everyone can say they have gone big in Japan! Scott Hawkins would later help the band to tour Japan. Hometime did eighteen shows in the space of just six days. The band was able to share the gospel through their music. God helped them to get over to Japan and He provided for them. The band sold a lot of CDs on tour. The Japanese tour was definitely

one of the band's favourites.

Hometime's favourite show though actually happened on a country Youth Alive tour. The band was playing in the rain. They were worried about a thunderstorm coming in, but the kids didn't care. Everyone was just going crazy for the band.

"If the kids don't want to leave; then we're going to play on," said Hometime. Nathan remembered sliding around everywhere on the wet and slippery stage floor. Earlier that day the band had been in car crash as well. Their ute rolled over, but as it turned out the band was alright. A favourite show and a car crash all in one day – this was not a day to forget for Hometime!

On Hometime's second record the band decided to change things up. On *Bought with Blood*, Hometime went a lot heavier. No dance music, no punk, just heavy stuff. The band went for drop tuning. They concentrated on fat breakdowns, with heavy drums. They did a lot of pre-production on this album. It was hammered and refined. They used less distortion on this record. The band wanted to keep everything tight. Guitar-driven sounds were still at the heart of Hometime. They wanted to produce a raw guitar based album. It had a much bigger sound than their first record. They were all very happy with it! Hometime had gone in with a plan and come out with some pretty heavy music.

Aaron from Hometime was the main songwriter again on the second album. However the whole band actually had by now progressed to add something to the music. While writing their second album Hometime would spend about six to eight weeks on each song. They learned to experiment more on this album.

"We were still listening to some Slick Shoes and P.O.D and of course Embodiment 12:14 in the lead up to this record," commented the members from Hometime.

"We know what it's like to be in a band crowd. I know I love massive musical breakdowns. We want the crowd to feel that same feeling with our music," Nathan said. The band really worked hard to achieve this on their second record.

Hometime were inspired by Jesus' death for us all. We have been bought with His blood. This is illustrated in track three, 'Bought with Blood': "Bought with blood, this saving grace, bought with blood, this

grace so undeserved, bought with blood, this saving grace, bought with blood, this grace no one could earn.”

It is true that our freedom has been purchased by the blood of Christ and by Christian soldiers; real blood has been shed! Hometime prayed that their music would have an impact on people’s lives as they prayed to be more passionate this time round. There is definitely more conviction on this album, you can hear the passion in their music, that’s for sure!

Lyrically speaking the *Bought with Blood* EP is amazing. Hometime presented several strong messages. The band was very much Christ and salvation focused and this comes out on track three: “Just open up your heart and just receive, open up your heart and just believe.”

This band would not only encourage people and teach people, but they would also share how to receive salvation. If we open our hearts to Jesus and ask Him to come in, then He will be our Lord and Saviour. Jesus’ story of sacrifice and salvation is told on *Bought with Blood*. The lyrics by Hometime are clear and inspiring.

Lyrics are also of vital importance to Wone. They started a lot later than most of the core Underground bands. Their lyrics reflect a heap of learning from the Underground scene. Andrew was no longer a kid searching to find his own way of expressing things. He was now a talented Christian poet; he knew a lot more by this stage and I do enjoy his lyrics. Andrew gets stuck into some Bible topics. He is able to share deep Christian themes.

“It’s important we focus on what God wants us to do. We need to picture where He wants us to go with our music,” Andrew said. At the time the band was focused on carving out their very own style of rock and roll. Andrew aspired to bring peace and hope to the world. It is important that as Christians we are proud of our faith. This excitement is then able to be expressed through our music and lyrics. Music can be a huge support to young Christians; it helps them to be strong in their faith and it also helps them to know who they are. Music is quite often a good talking point and a way to share your faith; it allows you to express Christ in a very natural setting. Wone felt it was important for them to focus on God’s directions, rather than worrying too much about personal aspirations.

Some writers brush over things lightly, but Andrew is direct and strong. The scene was now wiser and older by this stage. Wone was not like Lessie Does at all; lyrically speaking they were far more precise and to the point.

I have enjoyed watching Andrew grow and develop as a Christian poet. Lyrics are now his strong point.

“Just writing music can at times be an achievement,” Andrew said. Life has the ability to crowd out artistic expression. You have to make time to write Christian music. You have to work at it sometimes. A song can come out in five to ten minutes, or it can take months of work. There’s no fixed rule when it comes to song writing. Each song is like a piece of artwork; they are all achievements.

It’s amazing how many influences can be rolled into one song. Music is such a complex physiological thing, in that the brain draws in lots of different things to make one song. Often I count one or two bands that I am directly aware of, that have influenced my new songs. In reality though there’s a heap more than that who shape your music. There are of course all the bands that have already pulled you into that genre of music. Song writing is way complex yet at the same time it can all come out so simply.

Richard Wundke was the sound engineer for many live Wone shows. He helped them to obtain a good sound. He completed the Wone live show and made them into one of the premier Lutheran rock acts in South Australia—arguably even the whole of Australia. It’s these finishing touches that every band needs to have, in order to take them onto the next level. If you have a mixer who knows what your sound is, he or she can improve the whole performance enormously. When it comes to your live show, every little bit of improvement that you can grab helps your band to develop further. It’s very hard to compete with national and international bands if you don’t have a good sound engineer.

Andrew brought a lot of experience to the band’s live performance, coming from his Lessie Does background. He helped Wone a lot by developing their live show skills. Andrew was always a very polished performer. He had great timing and he usually nailed his guitar parts. Band members described him as a person who would bring peace and calmness to each of them before they went on stage. Andrew’s experience was invaluable to the band.

By 2005 Wone had got to the stage where they could develop their own home recordings. The reconciled single was recorded and produced by Wone. It was a real buzz for them to get to the stage of putting out their own package and product. The band was now almost self sufficient

and well on the way to putting out their first full length album. Wone was part way through recording when Andrew broke his arm and as a result the band had to put things off for a while. This break then eventuated into a band break up, although Wone still get together from time to time and they would love to finish off their album eventually.

Adrian Woithe from Wone has also been through a difficult time with cancer. He had a benign tumour removed and later a malignant tumour returned, yet it then disappeared. Woff came out of this experience knowing that God was with him for he felt His hand at work in his life during this time. Woff has been healed from this cancer and he is now out of the danger zone.

Despite a majority of the bands shutting up shop and calling it a day, Hometime and Embodiment 12:14 were doing good things. The scene was winding up; however there were still some good records and messages coming out. Only now, no longer would hundreds of Christian bands be backing up these leading acts.

In 2005 I would personally discover the Underground messages and records for the first time in a tangible way. I now had the lyrics and CDs from these bands in front of me. My eyes were gradually widened to what actually occurred and what went down during this period of Christian music in Australia. It was evident to me that the Holy Spirit had communicated through these artists. Christians were communicating the message of Christ through a cultural context.

When you're in a band you are always focusing on the next thing rather than reflecting on what has already happened. I knew the bands had dominated at a state level, but now I had an idea of what the artists actually had to say to people. Every band added something to the overall community. Sharing what the larger groups did is really only the tip of the iceberg. If I had all the messages and all the records from the bands that came out of the Underground, then we would have an endless story. What was going on was huge! God brought Jesus to the culture of the time. He did it though music and community. He did it through records and messages .

Nevertheless

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For all that I've accomplished,
What have I learned to stop
the suffering that I still cause?
Living by example,
But falling short,
Of what you've called me to be,
And now I see, what's meant to be,
It's not reality (just fantasy)
And now, not to promise,
But to strive for,
A better life than we had before,
To know that I will fall, always,
(fall again)
And I'll fall, and it never seems to end,
And I will fall all ways
(fall again)
But I know one day this helplessness will end.

ARTIST *Music and Words by STR* ■ SONG *Nevertheless*
BAND *STR* ■ RECORD *When Words Fail* © 2001

Australian Christian Bands

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2006

*To need is our perfection, in weakness we are saved,
to venture risk, to suffer loss, to speak the truth unashamed,
the winds of persecution can only fan this flame,
the moment like vapour fades away, it's time.
Born again, I take heart, I'm set apart to another way,
I'm born again, to be a light in the dark, to illuminate,
and it's hard to survive, only you can do it, keep me alive,
I know you'll see me through it. Unashamed, I'm born again.*

Dan Jones, *Born Again*
GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD

I'M A BORN AGAIN CHRISTIAN NOW. I once had a strong childhood faith; however I have been blessed to rediscover this faith again for myself as an adult. I did this through music, bands, people and the Bible. Yahweh was always teaching me about Him as I studied the world of Christian music. It was actually out of my weakness and mental health problems that God saved me. This led me to become baptised and born again.

Though I have suffered loss of health I can now speak the truth of the gospel to the world by sharing the story of the Underground bands. These

groups were in many ways the light in a dark world. They shared a message, unashamed of Jesus. It's definitely not my story alone that I express; I share the words and sounds of the artists. Not only did Adelaide have something to say, but Australia had a message to share.

Through the Underground bands God has communicated to me that He loves me. "In these arms of mine is where you belong." [**Hometime**, *Hand of Freedom*] This song, 'Hand of Freedom' by Hometime is simply one example of many of how Jesus communicates to me through music and lyrics. Jesus has me in His arms.

The Holy Spirit and Australian Christian bands have inspired me to continue to be passionate about music. It has been quite a journey for me to learn more about Jesus through bands. Half way through 2006 I stopped teaching. It was actually a massive relief for me to stop in the end, but even so, it would take me some time to adjust to this new life at home. Finishing up allowed me to look at what went down in the Christian music scene in Australia. It provided me with a time of reflection. I have also learnt how important it is to share what we have been through as musicians. God calls us to share our stories. In the Bible God asks us to tell our testimonies. This is a band testimony. Hometime is a great example of a band that testifies to Jesus.

Without Seraphs Coal I don't think I would have initially been so interested or cared so much about the Christian music scene either. However it only takes one band to pull you in, after that I got into a whole heap of bands, mainly through playing gigs with them. Seraphs really did help me to form my identity as a Christian artist to this day! I am inspired to be full on for Jesus just like Dan, Andre, John and Sam from Seraphs. I am inspired to share Christ's story and what He has done through this group of Australian artists.

As I have shared, after *Lessie Does* ended I suffered from mental health problems. However I continued to write worship songs at home, in this way I was able to still communicate Jesus' message of salvation with my family and church. In fact I was able to praise God, which was a big step for me! Although now my world trust circle was very small; no longer was I playing to large crowds, things were much more basic and this was definitely a time where I had to rely on God for survival. Clearly without the Underground records to listen to I would not have had any rock tunes coming into me. Getting further into Underground music and the Australian Christian

band scene gave me purpose; it has helped me to learn more about Jesus despite difficult health circumstances.

When it comes to Underground music, it's great to hear it, talk about it, celebrate it, learn from it and reflect on it! Otherwise how else can we move forward, grow and develop as Christian musicians and artists in the future? The challenge is now, what can we create in the future? What can Australian Christian bands and artists communicate to our nation and to the world? What role can we play in the international scene? What can every artist in the world create with God?

I would like to share with you some random reflections from Australian artists on the topic of Christian music. I pray that these reflections from the Underground and the nation allow education to take place for all people. It's important as music lovers that we learn from the past but also we learn from what Jesus has to say to us.

Jesus was also an educator. What Jesus taught on planet earth caused change. Christ continues to teach people through music today. This affects spiritual change in many humans' lives. In fact eternal life can be found in the music if we listen to the words from these records. I think it's important we take the time to learn from what Jesus has to say to us through music.

Although you are generally aspiring to take things further when you're in a band, God has His own plans and purpose for what you achieve and do. Playing in the Australian Christian music scene actually helped to keep my head grounded due to its small size. I think God kept us humble; the Underground is more a story about Jesus' grace and salvation rather than any massive individual performance.

God communicated through Underground bands like Hometime in a real way. This was done through their artwork, lyrics and music. "I am a Christian, a follower of Christ, I heard Him call my name so I gave to Him my life." [**Hometime**, *Everyday*] The Underground bands were small, yet Jesus chose them to speak to Australia and to the world.

Jesus also spoke through the church in Australia. Australian church bands became another important link in the Christian scene. Without the masses into music, there's no good having bands. The Australian church environment was just as important as the Underground venue and national community. Together they made a strong and distinctive musical culture.

One band that started out in the churches was Hometime. There is

now a desperate need for more Christian bands and more leaders, like Aaron. These people can have a big influence on kids, but with this comes a real responsibility to be a role model. Aaron from Hometime has played an important role as a leader not only for his own band, but also for his youth group. Aaron is a true witness to Christ in action. You can hear it best in his music!

Darren Reid from Embodiment 12:14 was himself another important leader within the Underground. As Darren looked back on the movement he said: "It's hard being a role model for people, but this is what keeps me in check as well. Often you're the only contact they have with God on a personal level."

It's important that we reach out to the world and not just sit in our own comfortable little corner and be happy with ourselves.

Role models provided kids with identity and direction. I often think you need to see pictures of what you would like to become, when you grow up. The band members provided some guidance in that way. If you're a skater when you're growing up, then you need to see a picture of what it looks like to be a Christian skater and if you're a hardcore kid, then you need to see bands like Embodiment 12:14, belting it out and representing Christ!

As we look back, clearly this group of bands shared Jesus with the youth of Australia. "We tried to let God direct us," said Darren Reid, as he reflected about sharing Christ with people. There were a lot of youth group kids that were saved through the movement. You often need support to be a young Christian in this world. The venue and band community created a whole scene and a whole network of support for Christians. It allowed outreach and evangelism to take place in the world.

Upon reflection Sam from Seraphs found that he learnt a heap about ministry and sharing Jesus with the world by playing in a Christian band: "It was just the right time for everything to happen. All these bands emerged and hit it together. No one knew what they were doing at the start, no one. The vision for the scene kept growing and growing out of the band venue. It was an awesome time, there was massive community. It was amazing. All of the bands were learning about God at the same time." It provided an amazing chance to express Jesus to the world.

The Underground bands were shouting out to this world in not just one style but several different styles. "It was a great thing to see all these

groups from the venue become prominent in their own genres. All these friends from the Christian scene became leaders in the state secular music world. We were all learning off each other and making mistakes together,” shared Seraphs. This learning process helped the bands to grow and articulate Christ.

The band felt the good thing about the whole scene in Adelaide was that there was no real distinction between Christian bands and secular bands. Everyone got along well. The state music scene was very much linked. It was not at all segregated. Christian bands and secular bands played together. This was the strength of the South Australian music industry at the time. In this way we were able to convey Christianity with the secular community.

Seraphs shared with me some final impressions. “It was an amazing miracle that we all found each other as a band,” said Dan Jones. It was a risk at the time to play Christian punk. People thought that this punk music seemed to be somewhat opposite to what Christianity was all about. However Seraphs labelled themselves as constructive punk rockers. I think Jesus was also a radical person in the world. He did not simply fit to the norm. Seraphs Coal never toned their message down either. They kept it real to the end.

The band expressed to me what their journey was all about. Christ was the main focus for Seraphs Coal. Dan Jones said: “We are Christians literally playing in the world, but we are not of the world. That’s what it’s really about. We need to make Christ the head of what we do. You have to live out Jesus wherever you are. If you can be a Christian businessman than you can surely be a Christian punk rocker.”

Importantly, the Underground helped young people to see themselves as Christians no matter where they were at. Andre said: “As bands we were literally talking to people in the gutter. In the pubs we could share our beliefs; it gave us all opportunities to speak to people. We are all given opportunities to share Christ. You don’t have to do anything important by world standards in order to share Jesus. We just need to be able to live it out. If Jesus wants us to speak in the pubs, then that’s where it’s happening. Wherever you are, that’s where you need to show love as a witness to God himself.”

“This is our art,” the band said. “We just did it!”

Seraphs were not completely sure how, but it just happened. The

band dreamed of supporting Underground local acts such as Jemima and they ended up playing with internationals, like MxPx, very early on in their career. They would sacrifice anything for energy. They gave all that they could. Seraphs would go hard at every show. You would never have described them as a fashion statement either, meaning this was not their focus. It was totally about the message for Seraphs. It seemed that about 60-70% of their fans were actually non-Christian, that's how much of an impact they had on the world. God used them as a witness everywhere.

You have to start somewhere, somehow and sometime. Dan Jones admitted that Seraphs all started out with no idea at all. We all just encouraged each other. "If you're into bands, then start a band, there is nothing better," said Dan. You just need to get the ball rolling in whatever ministry you're into. Often starting out is the hardest part. You can learn along the way, you can learn on your journey with Jesus.

Dan admitted that his own music counselled him along the way and that it helped him with his own personal journey with Jesus. He believed that he would always be working on some different projects from time to time. Dan saw an exciting future for Australian Christian music: "There is certainly a lot of movement and there is definitely a lot of room for new bands to come through now."

With one band ending it opens the door for another. It is always exciting for the music industry to have new bands coming through. The close of one movement opens up more room for new bands to get shows. Back when the organization started out Christian rock music was not recognised. Now it is more established, it's more specific, in that genres are well defined. There never used to be such a thing as Christian hardcore and punk music, but now there is!

The original Underground band scene has now largely come to an end. Pierris Kahrimanis worked on the Underground management team for some time. When he saw the movement go down, he set up a prayer group for the Australian Christian music scene, called Operation Canaan. The original Underground venue has finished and Operation Canaan has become an important group in the world of original Christian music.

The team meet regularly to pray and develop the band community. They also look to find ways of practically helping out musicians. Operation Canaan aims to bring the scene together and unify it. They see fantastic

dreams for Christian music in Australia. The prayer group see that the world is becoming a very small place. Pierris believes God is looking at the whole Christian music picture and not just Adelaide or Australia; God is looking at the world.

The Underground played an important role in the development of Christian music in Australia. "It's now a time however when you have to strategize and create new plans," Operation Canaan leader Pierris Kahrimanis said. We need to find a way to grow again. God is always moving and working amongst young Christian artists.

Music is something special that God can work through. We need to become more passionate about our faith and our beliefs. However it's important we have the right motives when we are doing Christian rock music. Operation Canaan pray that God will place original Christian music into His hands.

New groups will always emerge from the ashes of the Underground bands. Josh from STR formed an interesting project with Dan Jones after the completion of Seraphs Coal. They combined together to form a band called God So Loved the World. The band is what you would expect from these guys. They are full on energy balls. The band presents a high level of quality hardcore music, which is quite a change in style for both Dan and Josh after coming from the world of punk music. The energy however remains the same.

God So Loved the World became Josh's central focus after STR finished up. The lyrics from this band do not hold back too much at all. It's blatant salvation music. It's good to listen to a band that can help you along your journey to heaven. This hardcore music provides youth with identity.

With God So Loved the World people can remain hardcore kids and be true to their beliefs. They are a special band to evolve after the scene went down and finished off. They're kind of an after product or a fruit of the movement if you like. I think the story of Jesus will continue to go on through new bands.

In 2006 God So Loved the World released their debut album. Darren Thompson was the engineer and he also mixed the band. The quality of music produced by this group was very high straight away; there is a lot of experience shining through on this record. I love the rock influences coming through in the hardcore music. There are also some amazing vocals

by Dan Jones and some great guitars. The band released the CD at the Underground. Dan and Josh were still doing it for the kids. They had the right motives and God used them for His glory.

The band did things without looking totally at what was in it for them, rather the music was for the Kingdom of God. “All out for number one, forget the damage done (no way) not for me, take your own advice, I’ll live my own life, not for me.” [**God So Loved the World**, *Not for Me*] Living for selfish reasons was not for God So Loved the World. Their music was a strong message to the kids of today. The band encourages people to live for Jesus.

If I had to answer the question, what is the purpose of bands like For God So Loved the World; then I would argue that they can uplift and encourage people. Christian music gives humans energy and drive. It gives us passion. It feeds our soul and unites us with thousands of angels, Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit.

Christian rock music is good music. Cultural music is an expression of what Christians are going through at the time. Poetic communication is possible through the Holy Spirit, then it flows through the artist and then into the listener’s ears, mind and soul. It is invaluable for the world today. Original music is another way that we can communicate Jesus to people.

As Seraphs Coal shared with me, the advantage of Christian rock music is that it is far less removed from the world than worship music. In fact it attaches itself to the world. I think Jesus would like it. He calls us to be in the world, but not of the world. Christian rock music is simply that, it’s in the world and it’s not separate from it, yet God places messages within it. The Underground groups were able to play in secular venues and share the gospel with the world.

The story of salvation is not an easy message to get though for people on planet earth. We need to encourage humans to think about the songs and the lyrics. Subconscious messages are a good start, but we did not always see people making a conscious decision to follow Jesus. Still music is often the first seeds that people receive.

I pray that people listen to the bands’ messages. I first thought that Lessie Does music was not all that strong lyrically speaking, however now I think our style was more blatant than we first realised. Even if we were writing about general life topics, our faith and love for Jesus came through more than we knew it. God can use these songs as well as the more direct

Christian lyrics. There is definitely a place for positive lyrics in this world.

The classic original Waymouth Underground venue exists no more, after having provided one of the biggest chapters ever in the history of Australian original Christian band music. The venue started out with just a few bands playing until the scene grew massive in size. At the peak of the movement Undergrounds bands were well connected with the national Christian music scene. This was an important time in Australia.

During this epic chapter, Underground bands told the story of Jesus and they shared the message of the Holy Spirit through their artwork, songs, music and shows. Kids of this generation had something to say and they did it loudly and with energy. There was so much pure passion released through these shows. Although this venue remains no more we are left with the music and the story of what Jesus did through these artists.

Australian Christian bands and Underground bands shared Jesus with people, this is their journey and this is their story. They share what Christ has done for us! It is my journey also. The Underground played a small role in the world of Christian music; I know this to be true. I pray that you will continue to hear God's music on earth. May you find the truth in Christian music. For those who are searching for the truth of Christ may you be born again.

Let us live in Yahweh's grace, peace, hope and love.

Born Again

.....

To need is our perfection,
In weakness we are saved,
To venture risk, to suffer loss,
To speak the truth unashamed,
The winds of persecution can only fan this flame,
The moment like vapour fades away,
It's time. Born again,
I take heart,
I'm set apart to another way,
I'm born again,
To be a light in the dark,
To illuminate, and it's hard to survive,
Only you can do it,
Keep me alive,
I know you'll see me through it.
Unashamed,
I'm born again.

ARTIST *Music and Words by God So Loved the World* ■ BAND *God So Loved the World*
SONG *Born Again* ■ RECORD *God So Loved the World, Album* © 2005–2006

Jesus Culture and a Band Movement?

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*So if the Son sets you free,
you will be free indeed.*

Matthew Baker, *The Free*
MTW

I WOULD LOVE TO SHARE WITH YOU that my mental health and spiritual battles are over, however they have been ongoing. Each day I have experienced both good times and difficult moments. However I pray that God may use my struggles with mental health to further encourage people who are also going through spiritual walks and journeys, such as this band adventure.

In 2007 I took up a University course and began to study a Bachelor of Ministry. God has used this degree to teach me more about the Trinity and also more about myself. This study has led me into several ministries. Importantly, writing essays has helped me to grow and communicate my faith to the world.

Although the original Underground venue exists no more, Operation Canaan continues to be an active prayer group for original Christian music. I'm excited by what may eventuate through this spiritual relationship between God and His people. The members from Operation Canaan are

very passionate Christians about music and Jesus, and I know that our God answers prayers. He listens to our needs and our cries. I pray that God will hear the prayers of Operation Canaan.

Through prayer groups like these and also through studying the Bible ourselves we can actually listen to what God is directing us to do as artists and followers of Jesus. We can also experience the Holy Spirit communicating the message of salvation through us. Sometimes the Spirit has already been at work in our lives before we come to realize God's presence. Speaking of callings by the Spirit however, I have felt God personally call me to worship Him.

By reading and studying the book of Revelation, God has shown me how important worship is. I believe this is a time where our Holy Lord is asking us as a planet to humble ourselves and come before Him in worship. God is guiding and directing Christian artists to do this all over Australia and the world.

Pierris Kahrmanis himself was communicating to me that he was searching to see how God will direct the next generation of Christian artists in Australia. What will the next Australian Christian music movement look like? It is important for Christian bands to reach out to the world. Groups like the Underground band scene are vitally important, but I really do feel God is calling us to worship Him now!

God's greatest command is to love Him and to love our neighbour. Worshipping God is one way we can love our Lord and be in a relationship with Him. I pray that Christian artists of all ages from around the world may capture this vision. We must listen to the Spirit of the Churches and hear God guiding us and showing us how to live. If there was another pop culture movement in Adelaide and Australia, with bands like Embodiment 12:14, Seraphs Coal and Edison, then I think this would be great, but it's in my heart to share a call to worship God! Yahweh asks us to praise Him now.

Although I have not been well enough to be in a band and continue doing live shows I have completed a worship recording with my brother-in-law Nathan Purdie. Nathan was the lead singer for WaybackWhen, so it was great to be able to connect with him after both Lessie Does and WayBackWhen had finished up. The record was born out of approximately one hundred songs. I enjoyed spending this time with God and a lot of the songs were simply written on the porch outside of my house. This project

took six years to complete from the time I started writing worship songs, to the completion of the record. The CD was pressed in 2011.

In writing these lyrics, I grabbed bits and pieces from different psalms to form the music. The tunes were all very simple in structure, the whole focus was not on the music so much, it was more about simple melody lines. There was still a big pop culture stamp on the songs. The key foundation and base however to the album was the psalms.

Tim Rohrlach was one of the leading sound engineers behind the Underground music community and so I was very happy to have his help on this particular worship project. Tim worked on recording the music and he also guided me with the production side of things as well. We recorded a lot of the music in my home church. He was more than happy to go the extra mile to achieve the sound that we were both after.

Nathan Purdie played the piano and sang lead vocals on the album. I simply played the guitar and bass and I worked as producer on the music. Jeremy Owen from Lessie Does completed the harmonies for me. He has an amazing ability to sing so sweetly. His melody lines add a lot to the CD. Abbey Brown and Emma Owen also sang backup vocals to add in some beautiful melodic and angelic chords.

We have called our new worship group The Free. The name is based on the single off the album, which is titled 'Free Indeed'. This song and our group's name, is based on John 8:36: "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

I think God was helping me express Jesus this time round. No longer do I have issues sharing my faith. I believe God was correcting this one for me after my Lessie Does song 'Daynus' where my faith was rather all mixed up. At the time I could not express Jesus as the Son of God to the world, but now I can! Although I am held captive in the world of mental illness, I am free indeed in Christ.

Andre from Seraphs Coal shared with me that Jesus is the truth and the way. I know that Jesus' way is true as I have heard Him myself through people and I have tested out His teachings. The truth of His word shall set you free, as it has set me free! The Holy Spirit reveals to us God's truth.

I praise God that He has helped me to worship Him with others. This album is an offering of worship to God. You can still hear a lot of Lessie Does elements on this CD. Although I worked hard to generate a whole

new sound, I can hear those signature Lessie Does harmonies coming through. The more I tried to move away and create a new sound, the more I found myself returning to what I know and love.

Culturally speaking, even though this was an acoustic worship project I don't think that it was really that far removed from the punk and rock sounds of the Underground. If you added drums and a little bit of guitar distortion and you sped things up somewhat, then you could find Lessie Does in the music. Culture is something that we are all a part of and joined to.

I certainly feel that you can find Jesus in the arts. Culture is often the term we use to talk about bands. People will ask, what is the lifestyle of the band? What do the fans wear? What are the core beliefs of the group? What are they on about? Who do they relate to? Who are they like? What are their influences?

People are very interested in band cultures such as the Underground. Humans love to line up with their favourite bands as it is an expression of themselves and their own identity. Bands are a massive thing on our planet, so for this reason I feel the term Jesus Culture is an appropriate way of exploring what went on at the Underground.

Seraphs Coal, Thinktank, Edison and many other Underground groups helped to build a picture of what Jesus is like in the modern world. Bands such as these reflect Christian pop culture. They show the light off to the world. I'm not sure that even the members of these bands realize how much Jesus was shining through them, but as a struggling Christian I can bear witness to how big an impact they made on me personally. I know for sure that I saw Jesus in this group of people.

If you were looking to learn and experience Jesus in the modern world, then you could find Him in the story of the Underground. He was in the community and He was a part of our fellowship. Jesus was revealed to the bands, the fans, engineers, management and to all those who were touched in some way by the Underground.

It's interesting because the world really does value entertainment as being extremely important and in this way the Underground bands were able to fit into the world like a glove. As I have expressed, Christian art actually meets people and finds them where they are at. I believe that many kids were simply looking for entertainment and in doing so they found a whole heap of Christian bands, such as Embodiment 12:14.

We have a Saviour who constantly works to meet us where we are at! If we are into punk rock music, then God brings bands like STR and Seraphs Coal to us. Jesus communicates to people and He often does it in our own cultural context. Hardcore, punk and emo was certainly another way that people could hear and get to know Jesus and experience a message of salvation. Jesus joined the Underground bands to the world, meaning that these Christian groups would play alongside of other secular bands.

As a band, Lessie Does played in the world; we were always writing and singing about what we were going through. We also shared what God taught us, we shared the detail of what was going on in life. Everything has been stored in time capsules; the records preserve what went down and what happened. Even a small amount of Lessie poetry or pop art can say so much to us. God can communicate so much detail in just one simple record.

Yahweh's communication through the Underground bands was beautiful and powerful. One thing is for sure – the lyrics from bands like Embodiment 12:14 and Hometime will remain good Christian lyrics for ever; what will change is the pop culture and the way in which the music will be presented.

The Underground bands were in many ways different to what was going on in the world lyrically speaking. These groups provided people with a Jesus culture in their own home town and nation. It's good to have world class bands coming to your nation but there is something very cool about having your own cultural identity as a state and as a country. The Underground and national scene gave us our own personal and unique culture.

What was the Underground's message? I think the Underground's message could best be described as Jesus coming to the kids and finding them where they were at! This was a salvation message, where the best of our lyrics pointed to Jesus and His Kingdom. I believe that all of the Underground messages and records add up to tell the story of Jesus. When we put them all together we can see what the Holy Spirit has done through us. Songs share Christ and they allow us to express our personal testimony through poetry, pictures and words.

Culture and community are supportive to us and our faith, but our true identity must be found in Jesus not in a band or in a leader. I just

meant that we need to make sure that we are Christ-centred. Jesus is the main reason we should be into it. Rather than chase what is going on in the world of pop culture, we need to first have our foundations primarily placed in Christ before we can reach out to the world.

Interestingly God has helped me to become an encourager to Andrew Lang, Jeremy Owen and to the wider Underground scene. Although everyone has moved on with new projects and the Lessie Does days are now well and truly over, it is good to stop and praise God and encourage artists to continue on creating and relating with Him.

These days I enjoy studying God's word. It's a very different world to rock and roll. Writing at the computer and handing up essays is a totally different lifestyle, yet my ministry is somewhat similar. Although I'm not playing in a band anymore I'm still talking about it and writing about it.

I'm still excited by music. It speaks to me and helps me relate to God. Sometimes when I put on a CD, I feel God communicates a message to me. It is no different for me now, from when I played in a band. God continues to speak to me through art. He shares very deep and intimate words through songs. I think He loves this kind of relationship.

When I think of the perfect Jesus culture, I don't think of bands, I actually think about worship, church and community outreach. I think about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit relating to us through prayer. However Jesus loves to relate to the sinners. He can certainly do this through bands.

There are many ways you could describe what went down at the Underground but I like the heading Jesus culture and a band movement; these few words kind of sum things up for me after studying the music. A couple of the bands and also members from the Underground management team like to explain these events as simply a band scene, or a community, or even just a group of bands. I think this is mainly because they are very humble people.

Some bands like Seraphs Coal rather prefer to stand alone in what they did do and achieve through Jesus Christ. However, I personally have to agree with Darren Reid from Embodiment 12:14 and Andrew Lang from Lessie Does; I believe what happened at the Underground could best be described as a Christian band movement. Nonetheless the scene was never isolated or simply associated with the Underground venue alone, that's far too small a box for what went down. I think everyone would agree that

this particular group of bands did do something very special. How people do explain it and talk about it differs greatly.

Prior to the Underground complex there was no Christian original music scene for the youth, full stop in Adelaide. There may have been the odd one-off efforts but there was definitely no movement. It took one unique venue, dedicated to original Christian bands to get something going. Of course it's not a building that makes a church or a Christian community, but it did provide a home for Christian music. I think the Underground was a God anointed place.

It is possible to argue that the Underground music scene could be classified as a movement, but not because of any worldly success. If you measured the success of it all by secular music standards, then perhaps the community was not a movement. This however was an independent band scene, meaning that these bands were not signed to major record labels. Importantly, the bands came together at shows, CD launches and festivals, in this way we were united!

If I was claiming this was some big secular movement then I think I would have missed the point of what God was actually doing. The Spirit of the Church, the Holy Spirit was at work not only in our state, but the nation. This Christian band scene was unique for its lyrics, energy and beliefs.

It's interesting how God reveals Himself to us on earth. When Jesus teaches He often uses parables and stories with deep spiritual meaning. I believe Jesus has also placed deep spiritual messages within the Underground community. As I mentioned earlier, this is simply my experience and the experiences of several key bands from the scene, but if every band and everyone were to share their stories then we would have books and books on the Underground and the national Christian band community.

The Underground bands share a simple faith through their music. Just like my guitar style with rock chords and the blues scale, God has taught me the Bible in a very basic way through these bands. Yet I think this message is very relevant to the world today. We need to dream of heaven, we need to know salvation personally and we need to listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to us.

I look back on my time in Lessie Does and in the Underground scene and I am amazed with what God did achieve. I am more than happy to give

all the glory to God, mainly because I know that these things came to pass through Jesus. He worked within me and through my Christian brothers and sisters in Australia. God has used these life experiences to teach me and others more about Him. Jesus is an amazing leader. He is constantly teaching humans through stories and testimonies like the Underground about who He is. May you feel and know Christ's love for you through this personal band story and may you continue to walk with Jesus every day.

Free Indeed

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Praise the Lord! Hallelujah!
O give thanks to the Lord,
For He is good Hallelujah!
For His mercy
And loving kindness
Endure forever
So if the Son sets you free
You will be free indeed

ARTIST *Matthew Baker* ■ BAND *The Free* ■ SONG *Free Indeed*
RECORD *To the Angel of the Church, Album* © 2011

God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and Music



GOD'S PRESENCE WITHIN MUSIC IS AN IMPORTANT TOPIC for us to look into. God and culture are very much linked and united. Yahweh has used art to express the truth of what is happening in the world, for art is the light. It brings the truth of issues to the surface and the darkness cannot hide from it. Christian art tells the story of what Jesus is doing in the world. If you like, all of the messages and all the records ever produced on earth tell a story. They share the good on this planet and they bring evil to the surface.

Musical records can reveal human longings and ideals, but I think records also show the reality of what is happening on this earth. I believe music provides an insight into spiritual life, for it shares many human experiences of God in culture. Art allows further interpretation into subjects that Yahweh wants us to deal with. Music speaks from the heart; it can create a new space, a new zone of thinking. It reveals moods, senses, suspicions, gut feelings and inklings. However, more importantly, it allows us to relate with God.

Christian art truly testifies to who Jesus is. It clearly shares what He has done for us in this world. Art helps us to see and hear Jesus in the record stores and in our daily lives. Through music we can personally discover Christ, we can learn His truth. As Christians we are also able to share Jesus' message of salvation with all humanity through songs.

The Holy Spirit is a powerful creator. We have the same Spirit working in us that created the whole world with God; it is also the same Spirit who worked with Jesus to bring about salvation. It is this Holy Spirit who works through artists and helps Christians to create. As followers of Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes to us and guides us, He helps us to testify to what Christ has done for us. We can do this through many different and unique musical projects. Our God continues to give us gifts through art again and again. He loves us to join with Him in this creative relationship. God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit communicate to us through music and records. They share with people a message of salvation.

