

CD Review: Listen Above's Self-Titled Latest



Almost from its inception into mainstream America with Elvis wiggling his hips on “The Milton Berle Show,” rock music has had an awkward and sometimes downright tumultuous relationship with Christianity. In its earliest years, Baptist preachers across the nation chastened their primarily Caucasian congregations that the very rhythms of this nascent genre would drive their youngsters to a life of debauchery, crime and non-stop fornication!

Increasingly with the passage of time, those fire and brimstone predictions began to seem quaint and outdated, as each unfolding generation of rockers pushed their respective envelopes a few steps further. Soon, the once mutually exclusive kinship between religion and rock gave way to a blurring of the lines, with songs like Norman Greenbaum’s “Spirit In The Sky” and The Byrd’s “Jesus Is Just Alright With Me” (later popularized by The Doobie Brothers), mixing heavily distorted guitar licks with praising to the Lord. That said, striking the precise balance between spiritual content and secular sensibilities would always be the key between having a hit single like George Harrison’s timeless classic “My Sweet Lord,” or being resigned to the dustbin of history like the overtly religious, saccharine ‘light metal’ ‘80s band Stryper.

And striking that exact balance is the latest CD project from Mount Hope High School music teacher / local-music wunderkind, singer-songwriter David “Dj” Lauria and his assembled group of students, friends and family known collectively as Listen Above. Lauria refers to them as a worship group, as they are all members of the youth orchestra at Barrington’s Saint Luke’s Church. And under his tutelage, the eponymous seven-track album contains a variety of radio-ready tracks that contain a message of love and adoration to the Lord without ever crossing that line into “preachy-ness.” As Lauria explains, *“I wanted to make an album that was Christian without being CHRISTIAN. Remember how, after the first couple records, people would call U2 a Christian band? ... These tracks are a little more religious (a few, anyway), but there’s no God or Jesus anywhere. The final track could just as easily be about Skynet...”*

With David Lauria playing all guitars as well as producing, engineering and writing the material on *Listen Above*, the congregation is instrumentally rounded out by drummer Luke Imbusch, saxophonist Riley Saeger and percussionist Frank Carroll, as well as a cavalcade of vocalists in Caroline Coleman,

Yesi Rego, Haley Ryan, Kathryn Santello, Emily Turtle and Lauria's own children Jacob and Madelyn.

The disc opens with a straightforward rocker "Save Us With Your Grace," a near-perfect pop gem that combines elements of alt-country with George Harrison-esque slide guitar, all the while hammering home the power of prayer: *"Age-old song, chiming out. Silence shouts your name. Each of us, just a breath pleading with one voice."*

Album highlight "Your Love Prevails" can best be described as Lauria puts it, Linda Ronstadt fronting Deep Purple. And there's lots of truth to that, with the track's deliberate heavy backbeat and Machine Head-era Ritchie Blackmore guitar tone, all enveloped in Coleman's angelic voice: *"When sharp the day has blinded us, Your Love Prevails. Where injured faith has guided us, Your Love Prevails. We join hands to declare, someday we'll meet You where Your Love Prevails."*

Listen Above culminates with David Lauria himself stepping up to the mic with "Written In The Sky," a song that in a past life could have been an AC/DC encore favorite. But this time around the content is far more profound than Hells Bells. *"Every vow ever broken is written in the sky. Every pardon, every deal, every gift, every steal."*

As the band's website states upon entry, *Listen Above* is the sound of generations coming together to make music with a positive message. If every school, mosque, synagogue and church had a David Lauria expounding the joy of rock 'n' roll alongside that 'radical message' of God's love, just imagine how good the world would sound.