

Where the freedom is

HOPE AND HEALING IN MUSIC FOR THE SOUL

BY RANDALL MURPHREE

Music to find freedom from an eating disorder? From addiction to pornography? Music to aid recovery from breast cancer? To help with a special needs child?

“Tell Me What You See,” “Somebody’s Daughter,” “More Beautiful” and “Whole in the Sight of God” are the titles of CDs that deal, respectively, with those very issues. Each CD includes not only music, but moving testimonies of those who have found freedom in Christ.

They are produced by Music For the Soul (MFS), a not-for-profit ministry founded by Steve Siler in 2001. Other titles in the collection include “Chaos of the Heart” (for those grieving a suicide) and “Fifty Years from Now” (strengthening marriages).

In the interview below, Siler recalls the encounter that moved him in this direction after he had spent 11 years in the Christian music industry. During that time, more than 400 of his songs were recorded by such artists as Point of Grace, Be Be Winans and Sandi Patty. His song “I Will Follow Christ” won a Dove Award in 2000 for Inspirational Song of the Year.

The MFS mission statement reads: “Changing lives through the healing power of songs and spoken words that resonate with human experience and reflect the redemptive love of Jesus.” The CDs are designed to minister on a deep, personal level to those who feel they are in bondage and don’t know where to turn for help. On another level, the CDs are an invaluable resource for pastors, counselors and church libraries.

Siler is excited about a DVD version of “Somebody’s Daughter” now in production, with a September release date. He believes it will be a powerful tool to expose the evil of pornography and lead victims to victory.

Among Christian artists who sing on MFS projects are Scott Krippayne, Larnelle Harris and Clay Crosse. MFS resources are available at **877-298-9081** or www.musicforthesoul.org.

AFA Journal: What led you to this unique ministry?

Steve Siler: The seed was planted when a young woman at an incest survivor conference came up to me after I had sung a song called “Innocent Child.” She said, “People have been telling me that I was an innocent child my whole life, but I never believed it until I heard you sing it today.”

I thought, “There’s something that I’m supposed to do about that. What she just said is very important.” It was 11 years later that I founded the ministry. It took me a long time to figure out what I was supposed to do about that.

AFAJ: Tell us about your MFS staff.

SS: You’re speaking to the full-time staff – me. People go to our Web site and see all the material there and listen to the quality of our recordings, and they think we’re a big production company in New York or L.A.

I’m committed to the idea that we won’t record anything unless it can be the very best we can make it. Our recordings are expensive [to produce], but if we’ve got something that’s of God, it dishonors Him to do less.

AFAJ: How do you do it?

SS: I have about half a dozen committed volunteers who do everything from office work to helping at the studio. One committed volunteer gives us over 20 hours a week. I also have an advisory board made up basically of pastors and Christian counselors. I draw upon their input regarding, “What do we need to talk about on this record? What do we *not* need to say?”

Then we have employed more than 200 professionals over our seven years – songwriters, producers, engineers, arrangers, musicians.



Steve Siler

AFAJ: How do you articulate the vision God gave you?

SS: People will hear things in music that they won’t hear any other way. When you talk to people, walls of defense go up. When they’re reading, particularly when they’re in pain about something, the information really isn’t sinking in because their minds and hearts are in such pain.

Music has a way of washing over us and seeping through the cracks in the walls of our defense and open-





ing our hearts. When you open a heart, you can lay a message in there, and when you put that message with a lyric, which is a memory device, you have an opportunity to put a message in the heart in a way that it won't be forgotten.

AFAJ: Tell us about your mission statement.

SS: It talks about how our resources acknowledge the truth of human experience and reflect the redemptive power of Jesus Christ. Without the redemptive power of Christ, you can't reconcile or redeem or heal from that experience.

I don't want anybody to feel alone. I want people to know that the God of creation has not abandoned them. He is right there with them, in the middle of what they're going through.

The number one lie that people believe in all this is "I'm the only one." In our new DVD "Somebody's Daughter," one of the guys being interviewed said, "I believed I was the only one [addicted to pornography]." Then he paused and said, "How stupid is that? I believed I was the only man supporting a multi-billion dollar industry."

AFAJ: What about those who need counseling?

SS: Each CD Web page has links to more resources. We're not going to open a wound and leave you hanging. It's made clear in the liner of each CD that it is not a substitute for a relationship with a therapist or a pastor. When people come to our Web site, they can get those links.

AFAJ: Who is your target audience?

SS: Look at our catalog – there's something for everybody. Once we come clean with Christ about [our bondage], we realize that He still loves us and pursues us and heals us and has compassion for us. I think that's where the freedom is for everybody, regardless of our issues, because we've all got them. Whether we've covered your issue or not, you've got one!

AFAJ: How can music help a woman grieving over an abortion or a guy addicted to pornography?

SS: Music transcends language. You don't have to be German to get Beethoven. We hear music and we are moved. Music touches both the cognitive and the emotional, both mind and heart.

Melody is a memory device. So you've got something that touches heart, mind and memory. When you come to a woman who is grieving over having had an abortion, you can come to her with music and, with the very tone of the music, you can say to her, "This is a safe place. You're going to be embraced and nurtured and forgiven." This is going to be one of our future projects.

AFAJ: How about a success story?

SS: One day, a woman showed up at our office unannounced. She was a single mom and her 17-year-old son had committed suicide. There's a song on our suicide CD called "How Could You?" The singer screams at God, "I thought you were supposed to be all-loving! How could you let this happen?"

This woman said, "I want to thank you for putting that song on this record. I was so angry that I could not talk to God; I couldn't pray. I heard that song and

I realized that if all I could do was rage at God, that was OK. You gave me back prayer."

And it was just Psalm 88. It's nothing new. It's just taking something that we all have read in Scripture and putting it in the format of music.

AFAJ: What kind of live event do you do?

SS: Well, for example, we got a call last October to lead worship for an organization that helps people who are caring for aging loved ones or disabled spouses in the home. Caregivers are one of the fastest growing populations in America. Forty-six million Americans are caring for loved ones at home. They asked us to come and lead worship and teach classes at their conference.

AFAJ: What Scriptural principles guide your ministry?

SS: Our culture spends so many billions of dollars to put in front of us that which is dark, defeating and discouraging. So Philippians 4:8 has become very important to me – "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure ... dwell on those things."

AFAJ: Is there an evangelistic component to MFS?

SS: Obviously, Jesus is in the mission statement, so you don't have to go very far to see what we're about. But my approach to these songs is that I won't shoe-horn Jesus into a song where He doesn't belong. And I won't excise Him from one where He *does* belong. Some of these testimonies and songs can stand on their own away from the Christian faith and still be true. That has opened up some secular opportunities for us.

If people have been unable to find hope or peace, and they find it through our recordings, they'll want to know, "What is it about this recording, about this ministry that made a difference for me?"

And if they dig down deep, at the core, they're always going to find Jesus. If they

find peace and freedom, that's a story they're going to tell the rest of their lives. That's evangelism. We're trying to meet them at their point of need with Jesus. 

