



TOMMY WALKER'S GENERATIONAL WORSHIP MISSION

by Alexander MacDougall

For over 30 years, Tommy Walker has faithfully led the worshippers of Christian Assembly in Los Angeles, a remarkable church. A consummate musician, his songwriting, teaching, and heart for the things of God have provided a steady stream of blessing to our souls. Like all of us, 2020's pandemic has meant online ministry and flexible outdoor services for Tommy. Even without the Franklin Graham outreaches, Greg Laurie Harvest Crusades, or other conference work this year, his output and impact has not slowed down. His *Generation Hymns* projects are bringing worship teams into new

understandings of the role of diversity in the church. *Generation Carols*, a magnificent Christmas offering, is now available online for free!

[WMM] What a wonderful chance this is to catch up with you my friend!

[Tommy Walker] Thanks for tracking me down and giving me a chance to share some thoughts.

[WMM] I'd like to go back to your beginning

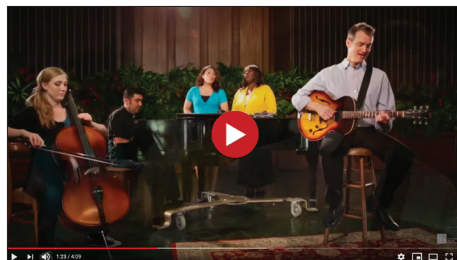
influences in the Faith. Your father, a pastor, in El Paso, Texas, had invited Jesus Music groups like Love Song, Blessed Hope, and The Way, to minister at his church, and little Tommy was there. Can you recall that time for us?

[Tommy] I think because the Interstate 10 freeway goes through El Paso, it was a natural stop for some of the Maranatha bands in the '70s. It was the Jesus Movement and the hippies were getting saved. Though I was the youngest one, I was there and when the group Love Song came and hung out at my

house after a concert, I had an encounter with the Lord. I was eleven and I knew that what these guys were doing, is what I wanted to do! I had just started playing guitar but knew at that moment it was a calling from God, and so I started practicing really hard.

[WM] As I was preparing for this interview time, I came across the song, “Someday”, from about six years ago. You co-wrote that with the incomparable Andraé Crouch, who passed a year after this video was posted. What a song! And who knew that you could play chromatic harmonica like Toots Thielemans or Stevie Wonder? Please tell us about this song and the life that it has had?

[Tommy] Andraé Crouch was one of the other biggest influences on me from the beginning. To me, he was *modern worship leader number one*, as in, the original! Anyways, I’ve had the



privilege of singing with Linda McCrary for many years and she set up a writing session for me with Andraé. It was incredible! He turned on his cassette player, yes, cassette player, and I started recording with my phone and I just watched him come up with a new epic song idea, it seemed like every few minutes. At one point he sang the line “someday it will all be over”. Basically, when I played back our session on my phone, I knew that was the nugget I would go after. It came together somewhat easily; however, I didn’t have a chance to play it for him until it had already been recorded. I was

so nervous when I finally did. Fortunately, he only had one change, which was a great one. He ended the song with “someday, it will all have just begun”! Little did I know, a year later his “someday” would have just begun. What a treasured honor to have been a part of one of the last things he ever wrote on this earth!

Regarding the chromatic harmonica, my Dad played harmonica when I was a kid. So, as a way of honoring him *and* as a way to keep challenging myself to learn new things, which I believe is super important for all of us, I took it up about ten years ago. As a matter of fact, as of yesterday, I started working on “Sleigh Ride”. Wow, lots of key changes!

[WM] You’ve been fortunate to work and worship with some of L.A.’s finest musicians and singers! And in so doing, diversity has always been a part of your ethic. Diversity is a buzz word these days, typically with reference to





race, ethnicity, and gender. But it also includes age. Ageism in the church is a problem, and sadly, many worship leaders have lost their staff positions merely because of their age. But you have been championing “generation” worship, even including children as part of your worship team. Tell us about your *Generation Hymns* efforts and your Biblical basis for it?

[Tommy] Let me tackle this as two separate issues. First, concerning diversity, I have just always been one of those people that has super eclectic taste in everything including food, places to visit, music, even in driving a different route home. I guess it’s just something God put in me, but then I moved to L.A. and was exposed firsthand to so many amazing musicians that taught and inspired me to embrace different musical styles. Probably the main one was and is Justo Almario. He was a part of Koinonia, a Christian jazz fusion band

in the ‘80s with Abraham Laboriel. All of those guys were my heroes. Because of Justo, who was already at my church Christian Assembly, many gifted people were drawn in. So, then I

thought, “Wow, any crazy thing I can attempt to write, these guys and gals can play!” I’m getting off track a bit, but I was just trying to write worship songs that were really fun for the band to play and really easy for the congregation to sing.

But here’s the bigger point. In Revelation, it says that the nations will be worshipping before the throne of God. This must mean that God wants His people to hold onto at least some aspects of their culture and let their worship be infused with it! I passionately believe that the Bride of Christ would be only more beautiful, if when we went to different churches, it didn’t all sound and look the same.

Regarding the generations. This is another huge passion of mine. I think it’s probably because I had the immeasurable blessing of worshipping with my family when I was young! To this day,



Blessed Assurance



Full Worship Set #2

nothing has been more life changing than remembering moments when I worshiped with my parents and siblings! And let me remind any parents out there that your kids need to see your relationship with Jesus. And worshiping with them is one of the greatest ways to show it! The other point is, God is a Father and we are *all* His children. So, it makes a lot more sense that we would love and honor Him together and not separately!

[WM] What is the biggest thing that you have learned by leading worship with all ages, races, genders, and cultures?

[Tommy] The most important thing is that we are all teachable! The young need to learn from the old, and I think in this day when it comes to being on a worship team together, the old can learn from the young. Because worship music has an aspect of it that is art and because art is always influenced by culture, there is no way, I as an older worship leader can be as up on the

new sounds as much as the younger are! We also have to be willing to not have everything done the way we like it. It's like when your family decides to go somewhere or do something that isn't your favorite. We don't bail on our family at that point but hopefully, on both sides, live with some give and take. There is obviously a lot more to say about this important issue but let's keep contending and forgiving!

[WM] Tommy, you've recorded for multiple labels but seem to have made a conscious decision to go "independent." *Tommy Walker Ministries* now releases your recorded music, videos, and resources. It seems as though that by going this route as a non-profit, you are unrestrained in your ministry endeavors. Can you tell us about this?

[Tommy] Well, to be honest, a lot of things were colliding all at once. While my music was selling less and less, I was noticing artists putting up YouTube channels along with other

social media and reaching lots of people in the process. Meanwhile I had always thought about how great it would be if I could just give everything away. So, with much prayer and council, I went for it and the good news is, it's working! The reason I say this is, it's not just good news for me, it's good news for other Christian artists, songwriters, and worship leaders out there that have a genuine heart for God and are looking for a way to be funded. You basically start a nonprofit and faithfully grow a group of people that will partner with you and support you! I obviously had a bit of a head start with some things I've done in the past, but it has mostly just been done independently with a very small team and myself. Since 2015 we have now given away over 100,000 resources including songs, charts, tracks, videos, and the like, to over 80 nations. It is such a joy to do it! It is definitely something to consider. To God be the glory!

[WM] You are so prolific in your efforts to teach



and lead in worship. *One-minute Lessons*, your *Song of the Week* program, worshipping with friends, live worship sets, worship playlists, are all just a few of the many activities that you are involved in. With the Corona virus cancellations of your normally busy conference and concert outreaches, you've definitely kept busy during this year. Tell us about 2020?

[Tommy] Fortunately, a lot of what Tommy Walker Ministries does is online so we just kept plugging along the best we could. We created several worship sets for churches to use, put together a virtual choir video with one of my old Promise Keeper songs "Yes We All Agree" and are working on a socially distanced album with my daughter.

[WM] Can you tell us about your affinity for James Tyler guitars?

[Tommy] I didn't even know it but years ago James Tyler was attending my church. After meeting him there I visited his booth at the NAMM SHOW and there was this amazingly beautiful guitar at the center. The paint job on it was called the Holy Schmeear. I was in awe of it and then he said, "It's yours. I made it for you and the colors represent the ephod which the priest would wear in the Old Testament; blue, gold, purple and red." So, it was like I was putting on my priestly robe every time I would lead worship. He later made me an electric guitar which included a bridge pickup so I could have acoustic strumming sounds but also be able to play solos. Needless to say, I've been playing his guitars ever since and highly recommend them!

[WM] We would love to hear about your new *Generation Carols* project, as well as your plans for 2021. Don't you have a new release planned with your daughter, Eileen?

[Tommy] *Generation Carols* is free for the taking on my ministry site. It's represented on my YouTube channel and is also on all streaming platforms. It is part of my *Generation Hymns* series, highlighting the beauty of the



Tommy and his daughter Eileen Walker



In God's Family

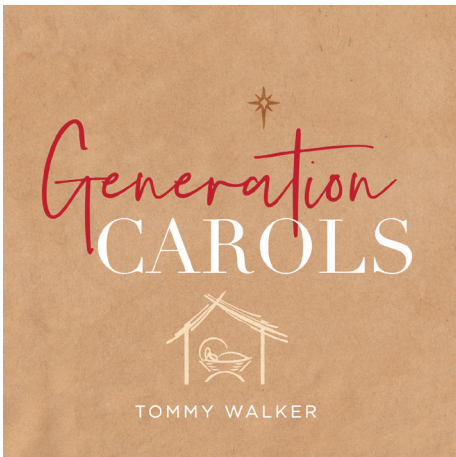
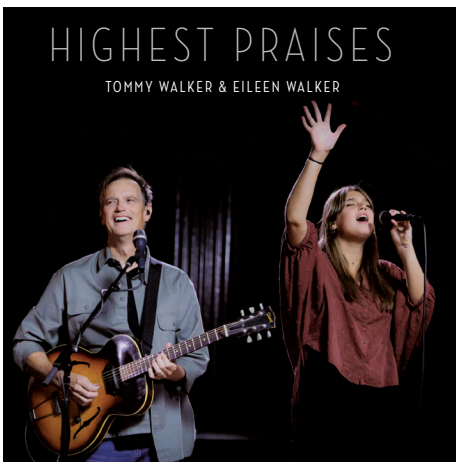


Guitar Solos



generations worshipping together.

Highest Praises will be my latest album and will actually be a father-daughter worship album with my youngest, Eileen. We are super excited about it! We each wrote half the songs and, I think and pray it will be a good example of how the generations can work, create, and worship together! Eileen has a more current, modern worship sound and I have a more eclectic sound, so with them all meshed together we feel like we have captured some fresh moments which is what I know we are all looking for! It will be released early next year but we've just released the title cut on video only.



Tommy and Robin with daughters Emmie and Eileen

[WM] Is there one question that I should have asked, but didn't?

[Tommy] Well, something I feel like God spoke to me yesterday was, "The more clearly you can define your calling and the unique way God flows through you, the more effective you will be!" Keep making the main thing the *main* thing and let everything else flow from that! There are so many good things you can do but you will miss out on the best thing if you don't take time to listen, think, pray, meditate and get council from others as to what that is.

[WM] In closing, do you have any encouragements for worship pastors, leaders, and Christian musicians that you would like to share?

[Tommy] Yes! Be encouraged. God is at work in and through you musicians, singers, worship leaders, tech people, even when you don't see it. Be reminded that inspiring people to worship Him is more important and more powerful than you will ever know!

[WM] Thank you Tommy for this time. You are a consistent inspiration to all of us.

[Tommy] Thank You! 

