

# Hillsong United

A night of worship with United is one to experience. It's a night when the worshipper in the crowd sees corporate worship done with excellence and purity, where interaction with God, within the band and alongside the crowd is distinct but one.

Though the music of Hillsong Church in Sydney, Australia, has impacted the global Church for over a decade, it has only been in recent years that the experience of Hillsong United has gained more exposure. Its youth-oriented brand of driving, melodic modern rock and worship choruses convey the Christian experience through clear, simply stated lyrics – connecting with an ever-expanding audience of youth.

“We’re so blown away with what God is doing with United,” says creative director, worship leader and songwriter Joel Houston. “We’ve been doing the same thing for a long time now – building our youth ministry. There are a lot of people that went before us, who laid foundations for us to build on, and there are many guys and girls in our church who genuinely love God and are just giving their best to Him. That is the strength to what we are doing – a whole team of people who are so committed to building our church and youth ministry locally, week in, week out. I feel that while people are connecting with the music, the heart of what we are doing locally is what is resonating with people all over the place.”

Local ministry in focus, Hillsong Church has long drawn from the deep and talented pool of worship leaders and songwriters found in the United youth ministry, including worship leaders and songwriters Reuben Morgan and Marty Sampson among others. “One of the strengths of our church is the way the youth are embraced and encouraged to be a part of all that is happening,” says Houston.

Though there was no set plan for United to become its own recording entity, Hillsong United has released seven albums since 1999. Their discography includes: *Everyday*, *Best Friend*, *King of Majesty*, *To the Ends of the Earth*, *More Than Life*, *Look to You*, *United We Stand* and most recently *All of the Above*, their first-ever studio recording.

The music series became a way for the worship team to chronicle what was happening in youth meetings. “A lot of the worship that has come from Hillsong over the years was birthed out of the youth ministry – songs like ‘Jesus, Lover of My Soul,’ ‘My Redeemer,’ ‘I Give You My Heart’ and many others emerged from our youth camps or services,” Houston says. “The reason we first recorded a United album in 1999 was simply that there was an overflow of songs being written by the youth and were particularly youth-focused.”

Writing original songs for the United youth group is an intentional process for the worship team. “When we write our songs, we have always tried to capture the heartbeat of our young people: what are our prayers, what issues are we dealing with, what is relevant to us right now, how best we can communicate that. Many of the kids in our youth ministry are new in their faith, so we try to write songs that help them connect with God and that make sense to them, as well as songs that freshly communicate biblical truths in a new way for this generation. Ultimately, our young people have the final say on what songs get recorded, the songs that go best in our worship times.”

The United worship team is an extensive affair with about 200 young people involved creatively as musicians, vocalists, production, artists, designers, media and the like. Downtown and in the suburbs every Friday night, six age-focused groups have their own worship teams made of students from that age group. The key musicians and worship leaders that appear on the albums direct the worship teams of a certain age group and focus on mentoring and discipling those teams.

“We keep focused on what we’ve always done: loving God and loving people the best we know how,” says Houston. “God has always been the one to open the doors, and as He does, we’ll walk through them. We have a great culture here that helps us stay grounded and focused; what we are a part of is much bigger than any individual. Our focus is to build our church, to keep reaching people who need to know Christ. We’ll do that every way we know how and with every resource available to us. In the process we need to invest into the next generation and equip them to take what we’re doing even further.”

Where the team stands now is with growing recognition and reception from around the world as it has led worship in Japan, Hone Kong, England, Scotland, Netherlands, Colombia and the U.S. Still, the heart of the team and its leaders is to remain home. “At the moment we have to say ‘no’ to many things because they clash with what’s happening at home. But we’re building the foundations deeper and wider so that we can continue to do more and reach more people,” says Houston.

“We’re just getting started. There’s a lot of people who need to know Jesus. If our worship is just great youth meetings, nice songs, lots of jumping around and a few CDs, then we’re missing it. Our vertical expression must have a horizontal effect. So, we’ll continue to worship, praise and honor God with heart, soul, mind and strength the best we know how, but the fruit of that must be a generation who are totally committed to reaching the lost and helping those who need help, locally and globally.”

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