

ARTS



He's alive!

music for the soul

Karen Walker reviews Gen Verde's latest CD 'He's alive!' with songs for the Easter season and Holy Week.

Following the success of their last album 'On the other side', a scintillating collection of songs tracing their individual experiences and life stories, Gen Verde have this year poured their significant talents into a revision of an earlier release. Translated from Italian into English, music from 'Il Mistero Pasquale' has been given new life through fresh instrumental and vocal arrangements resulting in their sixty-ninth album 'He's alive' – Songs for the Easter Season and Holy Week.

Debates about the nature of, and distinctions between, worship, church and liturgical music have endured for centuries and do not look like dying down any time soon. What qualifies as 'sacred' music and what makes it 'worship'? Is there a difference in spiritual value between a popular modern worship song like 'In Christ alone', a traditional hymn such as 'When I survey the wondrous cross' or Mozart's Mass in C Minor, if they are all capable of leading a person to devotion?

Surely there can be no definitive answers because the applications and interpretations of liturgical, sacred, church or worship music are so varied and the impact upon the listener or participant subjective.

Five decades of Gen Verde

There is no doubt that the span of Gen Verde's music over five decades covers all those labels. In recent years their work with young people across Europe and the Far East has seen them successfully venture into the popular end of music. Albums 'Music made to be played' and

'On the other side' fuse a myriad of influences from latin rhythms, rock music, rap, K-pop, and bluesy, soulful ballads, never failing to address challenging issues that affect society today, and all from the perspective of their Gospel driven view on life.

'He's alive', however, brings to us material that is specifically liturgical music to accompany the most important season in the Christian calendar. And this long awaited work in English doesn't disappoint. The huge amount of labour that has gone into its creation is evident in the beautifully crafted settings, the choice of instruments, the careful recording and layering of the vocal textures, and the depth of language and imagery used.

The Easter mysteries

The first track 'You call us by name' immediately welcomes you into the spirit of the CD. Intended as a song of gathering, it is fresh, joyful and anticipatory and, although a new song, to me it already has the feeling of a much-loved classic. 'Our hearts fill with wonder as we enter your doors ... turn every darkness into light for us, Lord'. And from there the rest of the album unfolds – a collection of intricately assembled songs that take us gently but confidently into the heart of the mysteries of Easter.

The Liturgy provides the words, of course, for the usual sung highpoints of the Mass. Traditional in tone, triumphal brass and strings, together with a host of multilayered voices, builds the Easter Gloria to a fulsome crescendo and the Alleluia offers a joyous, almost light-hearted, response, 'Christ our Pascal Lamb has been sacrificed, let us then feast with joy ... in the Lord'. 'Holy' is vibrant with melodic choruses of upbeat Hosannas; 'Lamb of God' contemplative and sparing in arrangement of piano and trumpet.





Like a river

‘Like a river’, a song for the Preparation of the Gifts with its gentle, trickling beginnings of guitar, harp, and violin, grows and eventually nestles around a bed of rich bass notes and latin percussion which holds it all together. Sung in the round it resembles the motion of a gentle river, swirling and bubbling along, and carrying us along with it, ‘Like a river flowing forth in all its glory, we come to you...with these hands we hold up before you all the suffering of humanity.’

The remaining pieces on the album – which serve as Communion and Recessional songs – bring a focus to the stories and experiences that are the permanent hallmarks of any telling of the Easter story – Mary Magdalene’s experience of meeting the risen Jesus; the women at the empty tomb; the revelation on the Emmaus Road; Jesus kneeling to humbly wash the feet of the disciples to show that those who love and serve are the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Morning will come

My personal favourite is the last track – the hypnotic, stripped back, prayerful ‘Morning will come’. A simple

organ accompaniment provides a metrical backdrop for poignant lyrics. A Communion meditation, or whilst waiting in the hollow of Good Friday, the heartbeat of hope continues, ‘I feel your life within me, and from your side, your wounded love flows mercy without end. You pour your life out for me and in your precious blood I’m washed and by your death redeemed... Though I’m weak I hope in you. You’re by my side forever ... a love that has no end.’

Displaying a growing mastery of their musical and recording crafts, Gen Verde have given us another gem. Whatever you like to label it as – this is sacred music, liturgical music, worship music – all the above – and it brings an injection of new life, energy and creativity to the realm of sung liturgy in the UK and the English speaking world. It’s inspirational, moving, engaging, and deserves to be heard ... and sung. 

The ‘He’s alive’ CD is available as a digital download from the Gen Verde website www.genverde.it