
SOUNDBYTE: I literally get into the clothes at the end of the bed. If somebody doesn't take them off and wash them, things would probably get a bit high. -- Bono

RARE RECORDING FEATURING THREE-FOURTHS OF U2 FOR SALE

Message from 1981 described as 'fresh and relevant' [@U2 July 03, 2006](#) by Scott Calhoun

A company in Littlehampton, England, offering an eclectic line of products, from holiday packages to financial advising to books and CDs, is selling copies of a presentation Bono, the Edge and Larry Mullen Jr. made 25 years ago to a weekend retreat for Christian musicians.

Dream Depot advertises its [U2's Vision](#) CD as a "never before available" recording. Its web site says: "Be inspired by Bono, the Edge and Larry talking about the spiritual roots of U2 at a music seminar in 1981. Drawing heavily on Old Testament prophets, they explain their vision for the band and sound a warning to the Christian music scene."

The January 1981 retreat was held at the Gaines Christian Center in Worcester, England, and organized by Laurie Mellor as a Ghattout Music event. Mellor started Ghattout Music in 1980 as a recording and management company for motivating Christian musicians to leave the Christian music sub-culture behind for the mainstream music world.

Now a director of Dream Depot, Mellor said he met Bono, Edge, and Larry in the summer of 1980, just prior to the release of U2's debut album, *Boy*. After getting to know them later that year, he asked them to come speak at his retreat.

"I invited the band because I felt their presence would be inspirational, and so it proved," Mellor said. "The invitation to speak was accepted at once, and I believe the three felt their presence was very beneficial."

On the 45-minute recording, Bono, then 20, and Edge, 19, speak about their faith, the battles they face as Christians in the music business and their sense of what lies ahead for U2. They read Scripture, talk about justifying the expense of producing their next single ("Fire") in the face of global poverty, tell a few jokes and invite feedback from the audience.

The Dream Depot Web site advertises Larry as being a part of the talk but he does not say anything on the CD. Mellor said Larry did not speak during the presentation.

Bono's vision for U2, he tells the audience, is for the band to have the same aggressiveness of punk rock toward what he calls a "farcical Western society," while also offering more hope to listeners than most of the popular music of the 1960s and '70s did.

"I would like to think that in U2, we are a very aggressive band, we are an emotional band, we are a live band. I think that's good, I think it's good in the Lord, because...John the Baptist and Jeremiah were very loud and quite aggressive, and yet glory-full," Bono says. "I think we have a love, an emotion, without the sort of flowers in our hair. And I think we have this sort of aggression without the safety pins in our noses."

Bono mentions Isaiah 40:3 -- "this is the Scripture that the Lord has basically shown us with regards to the band" -- and then reads it to the audience: "A voice is calling, 'Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. Let every valley be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; and let the rough ground become a plain.'"

Isaiah 40:3 is a verse of instruction for Bono, he says, and for the band's future. "I see our position as Christians as to make way, make straight a path for the Lord for a second time. In that sense we have to make the rough smooth and get involved in making the rough smooth. But before the Lord can use the band...He has to sort of make our rough ends smooth and that's what the Lord had to do," Bono says.

During the course of the presentation, the Edge speaks only in one spot for about six minutes. He reads from Psalm 40 and Jeremiah 29 and speaks about his understanding of being obedient and what it means to wait for the Lord.

Two years after this presentation, U2 recorded "40" with lyrics directly from the Psalm for their *War* album. "40" would later become a signature closing number on tours in the 1980s and, most recently, their Vertigo tour.

Mellor said he invited the three members of U2 to this Ghattout retreat to be a sort of "visual aid of what God was trying to say about getting out of the ghetto." He thought Bono, Edge, and Larry could be especially effective in this role. "They were becoming aware of a separate Christian music scene and hoped, by their presence, to challenge this," he said.

In Mellor's words, he thought the band sounded a warning to the Christian music scene saying that it did not have a lot of purpose. Bono explains on the CD that some musicians are gifted to make praise songs to God and others are gifted to make music about God for reaching out to others.

"It is very important that people don't see themselves as outreach in the music world if they are playing the Christian circuit," Bono says. "What we've got to do in the music business is destroy the image that has got through...which has [given] God almighty and Jesus Christ...an image of a weakling. A slightly effeminate image. A sort of Sunday image. A religious image. This is not the case...this is something we're trying in U2 to do something about."

"The time is right"

About 100 people were at the retreat and heard presentations from other musicians during the day, Mellor said. But it was Bono's talk that Mellor thinks is worth releasing now.

"Bono's incredible energy and passion communicated to the seminar delegates. A number of us had a real excitement in our spirit," Mellor said. He wants a new generation of Christian musicians to capture the excitement felt in the 1981 audience.

"I now feel that the time is right for the CD to be listened to by Christians for its sheer inspirational value," Mellor said. "I feel that what they had to say in 1981 is as fresh and relevant now as it was then."

Bootleg copies of the talk, which run longer than the CD Mellor is selling, have been circulating for years. Mellor said he has not been distributing them and that he holds the copyright to the recording. He dealt directly with Bono by telephone to arrange their appearance, he said. "No contracts were signed. They were aware that the sessions were being recorded by Ghattout."

"Out of respect for the band, I did nothing with the original tape for 24 years. I was being over-protective, if anything, since I don't believe anything on the CD can harm the band now -- they are far too big," Mellor said.

Mellor added he has tried to contact the band several times over the past 10 years, "with zero response." In early June, he contacted their Dublin management office again and has not yet received a reply, he said.

Calling, calling: Voices then and now

The early 1980s were tense times for U2 as they worked carefully to establish themselves as a rock band. They struggled to not be dismissed as a Christian band by rock music critics, all the while being criticized from some Christian camps for not being more obvious about their faith in song lyrics. The three professing believers rarely spoke about their personal faith to journalists.

Although U2 played at the major Christian music festival Greenbelt in England in August 1981, they were especially wary of being associated with the Christian music scene. Not only was their presence at the Ghattout retreat a rare appearance by the three band mates, but they likely never spoke as a group in a context like this again, making this a one-of-a-kind event in the band's history.

Beth Maynard is co-editor of *Get Up Off Your Knees: Preaching the U2 Catalog* and keeps track of the intersections of faith and culture with a special focus on U2 at her blog [U2 Sermons](#). For many years, Maynard has observed the different reactions people of faith have had to U2.

"I've thought of U2 as an 'Isaiah 40' band for a long time, but to hear that they had that clarity of vision that early is pretty astonishing," Maynard said. "I wouldn't say I'm surprised by the Christian language, given when it was recorded, but I am struck by how well-developed the concept of being people of faith working in the mainstream music industry is."

Maynard added that the context of the times and the band members' youth is important to keep in mind. "There were hundreds of thousands of young people all over the world swept up in the charismatic renewal in the late 1970s and early '80s, and I expect if we could hear recordings of them, they'd all sound about like this. Maybe Bono is more verbal and wittier than most. They probably would have expressed themselves differently later. But it's still a revealing snapshot from a formative period in U2's artistic life," Maynard said.

She does have some reservations about a wide-scale distribution of this recording. "As a pastor I'm squeamish about this. When people talk about their calling, particularly at this young age, that's sacred ground, and I wonder if listeners will give it the respect it deserves? I'm glad nobody is selling a CD of me at age 20 talking about what God wants me to do."

What convinced Mellor to sell the CD was a revelation of sorts. "Last year, I felt I had the 'green light' from God to market and distribute it," Mellor said. Though he has not actively marketed the CD, he said that since listing it in September 2005 at \$25.95, he has sold a few dozen copies.

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