

ZORO THE DRUMMER //

MAKING HIS MARK

by Bruce Adolph



photo by Hannah Montez

I have known Zoro the Drummer for over 20 years now. We met when he and I both were trying to help a fledgling drum magazine called *Stick It!* The magazine didn't last, but our friendship did. He taught me a lot about the drum culture. Adding to his status of world re-known drummer, Zoro is also an instructor, author, speaker, pastor and one very encouraging friend. He has toured with a wide range of artists... from Frankie Valli & the Four Seasons to Lenny Kravitz, Bobby Brown, Lincoln Brewster and many others.

He has jammed with Stevie Wonder, Mick Jagger, and Steven Tyler, to name a few, and even traveled with Microsoft Co-Founder Paul Allen on the billionaire's famed mega yacht, The Octopus. Zoro's iconic image is portrayed in three recent biopics: *The New Edition Story* (2017); *Whitney*, a documentary on the life of Whitney Houston (2018); and *The Bobby Brown Story* (2018). Always impeccably dressed, it is Zoro's character though that really shines through when you meet him. He has a calling on his life from the Lord and it is evident in the way he walks it out daily. I believe it will benefit you to get to know Zoro... so let's dive right in.

[WM] Zoro, you have spent more than 35 years drumming around the world with a variety of musical icons. What led you to becoming a staff Pastor (and drummer at times, too) at Bayside Church in Roseville, CA? (*Roseville is a suburb of the greater Sacramento area*)

[Zoro] In conjunction with my musical endeavors, I've spent the last 25 years ministering around the world in just about every setting known to man, but have done so alone. I always wanted to be part of a ministry where I could offer up each of the gifts and talents God has given me as part of a bigger picture. I am a people person who enjoys collaborating and I prayed for years to be part of something special with people I would enjoy working with. The same God who has directed my steps throughout my life eventually granted me the desires of my heart and led me to Bayside.

My relationship with the church goes back 15 years to when I first met Ray Johnston, its founder and lead pastor. After meeting Ray at Mount Herman Family Camp, he invited me to one of the first Thrive Conferences at Bayside where I met and played with Lincoln Brewster. Throughout the years I continued to play there with Lincoln occasionally and speak at several of their Thrive Conferences. A few years ago, my good friend singer/songwriter Bob Kilpatrick invited me to stay with him in Fair Oaks, another suburb of Sacramento near Bayside's main campus in Roseville. During that time, I rekindled some of my Bayside friendships and developed new ones with some of their leadership team.

Over the last couple of years my visits became more frequent and I played for Lincoln Brewster's *Acoustic Christmas* tours for the past two years and spoke at a couple of their campuses. On one of my visits I had a divine appointment with Mark and Gia Kramer, an incredibly gracious and Godly couple who took an interest in my ministry work and got behind it with love, support, and prayer, and we became friends. They believed in me and in the work God called me to do whole-heartedly. It was they who rallied behind the idea of bringing me on staff at Bayside. Through their strategic efforts and prayers, God assembled a great group of Bayside leaders including Lincoln Brewster, and supporters who came along side

me in support of the idea.

There were many wonderful people who became the wind beneath my wings and I am eternally grateful to each of them who played a pivotal role. In God's eyes we are all a part of the same team. As long as each of us is faithful to do our part we receive the equal credit, and are awarded the same Super Bowl ring for the victory. Any of the positive impact I'm able to have is the result of countless people who have sown into me throughout my life. For their efforts and faith I believe God makes direct deposits into their heavenly account because according to scripture, he sees all, and will give to everyone according to what their deeds warrant.

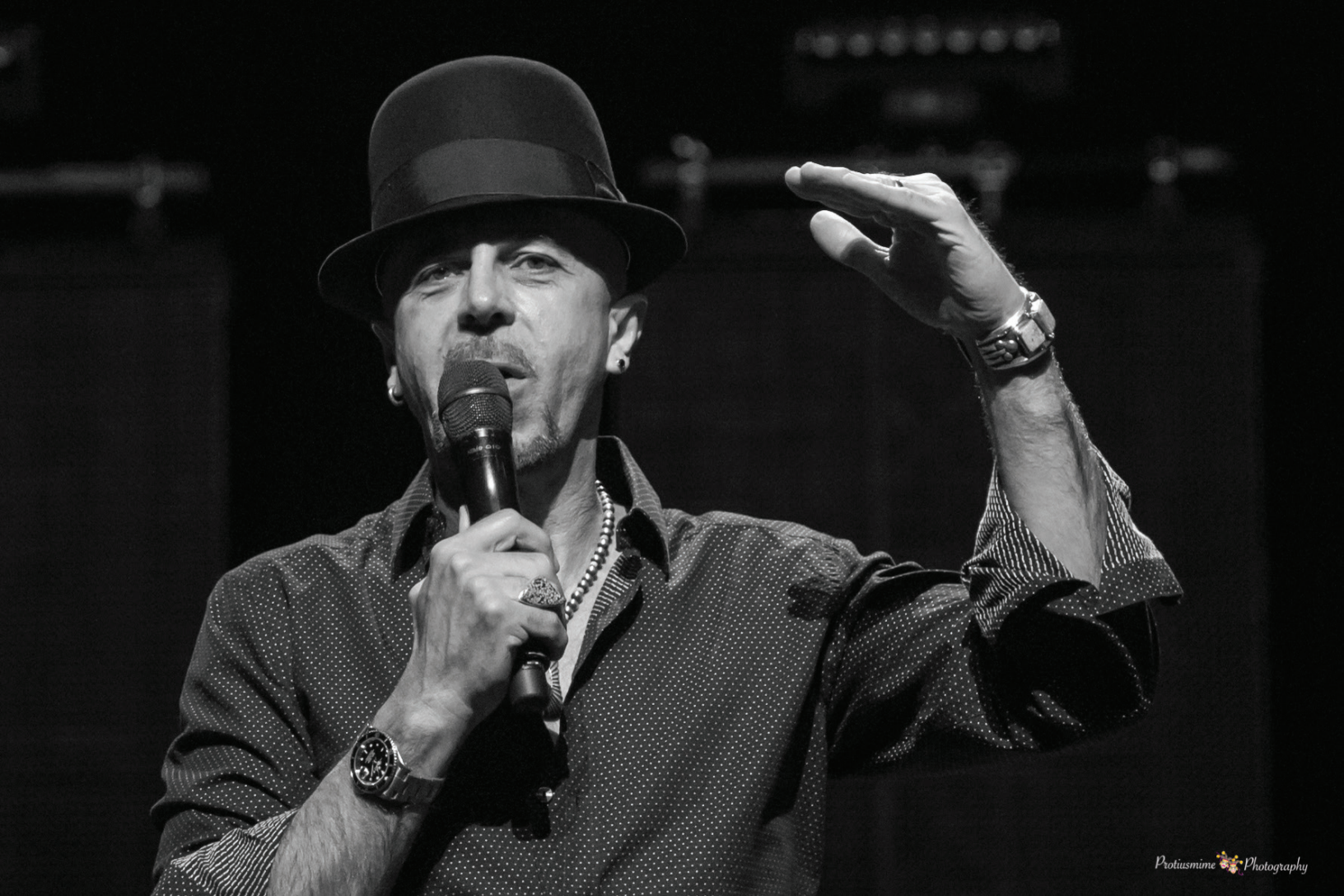
My goal is to far surpass whatever expectations anyone had of me. I do this by bringing more to the table than they imagined and I seek to do this as a way of honoring their faith in me, and their trust in God's promptings. I've always sought to be an asset, not a liability, to give more than I receive. This is my way of showing gratitude to them and to the Lord for the opportunity. President Theodore Roosevelt once said, "Far and away the best prize that life has to offer is the chance to work hard at work worth doing." For me there's no better place than Bayside to do the work God has called me to, and no better people to do it than with their staff, and those from the community who



with Lincoln Brewster



with Bob Kilpatrick and the Walkabout Drum



Protusmine Photography

support the church's vision.

[WM] What roles do you play there at Bayside?

[Zoro] I have multiple roles that are congruent with the gifts and talents God has given me. Since coming on staff I've done everything from dressing up as a pirate and teaching the Easter message to un-churched kids, to performing and speaking at Folsom prison to both the men and women. There is wide variety of outlets within the seven campuses that constitute the massive Bayside umbrella for me to minister. So far, I have been used to speak as an in-house guest speaker at several of the campuses, as well as to the young marrieds, singles, young professionals, high school, junior high, elementary, and the men's and women's groups. I've also been utilized as a speaker in many of their local outreach programs such as: Celebrate Recovery, St. John's Program for Real Change, Mercy Multiplied, and the Yuba

City Juvenile Hall.

In addition, I teach Biblical life principles at Bayside's Thrive School, which is a fantastic place for young people to pursue a college education with opportunities for hands on ministry experience. There at the Thrive School, I'm an instructor and mentor training up young worship musicians, pastors and leaders in the local church.

Every assignment carries the same value to me, and nothing is more important than anything else. I give my heart fully to everything that's asked of me and do my best work in every situation God places me in. By profession, I'm a drummer, speaker, teacher, author and mentor, but I remain flexible in how God wants to use each of those gifts to fulfill his purpose for each season of my life. No matter what I do, my spiritual gift of an encourager comes out strong because that's how God wired me. It's

important to discover what your strengths are and to walk in them because they are there by God's design, and he expects us to use and multiply them.

Working at Bayside where I'm given the privilege of doing what I love to do is a dream job for me. I have truly entered the most fulfilling and fruitful season of my life and I'm excited to be used more and more by God in strategic and meaningful ways in the days ahead.

[WM] It sure seems like the church leadership has given you the freedom to be who God made you to be. How does that feel and are you still able to be a musician?

[Zoro] The leadership and culture of Bayside is absolutely amazing and rare and I love being a part of it. Ray has attracted and nurtured servant-hearted leaders who are smart, strong, wise, and yet very humble which is also rare.

They value the gifts and talents God has given me and recognize my heart's desire to make a difference wherever I go with whatever I'm called to do.

Therefore, they have graciously granted me the freedom to be who God made me to be and of course that feels magnificent. We are at our best when we're doing what we're gifted to do and around people who bring the best out in us. My committed colleagues at Bayside are world-class people of excellence who inspire me greatly and I love being around their hearts and synergy. I've also made some great lifelong friends here. So have my wife and children, and we are thriving as a family at Bayside in every way, which is a tremendous blessing.

I will always be a musician, but that's not who I am. It's only one of the things I do. My identity is not in what I do, but rather in whom I belong to and in whom I do everything for. I am an adopted son of the living God, a bondservant of Jesus Christ. I live to serve him and I'm driven to expand his kingdom and build his people

with the skills, position, platform, testimony and influence he has given me. In essence, I am nothing more than a trusted steward over the master's property, which is of course everything.

[WM] You are consistently voted the #1 R&B drummer by the premier music industry publications Modern Drummer, Drum! and Rhythm Magazine. What shift takes place in your mind when you're sitting behind a drum kit ready to start a worship set at Bayside?

[Zoro] There is no shift because my job is always the same in any setting, be it musical, personal or spiritual. First serve the Lord with all my heart, mind, soul and strength, then as a musician to serve the music, the song, and the team I'm playing behind. I see myself merely as a servant and drumming is just one of the ways that I serve. I have the privilege and good pleasure of playing regularly with Lincoln Brewster and with Bayside's Midtown worship team, an incredible funky R&B oriented ensemble comprised of a group of highly

talented individuals.

[WM] You have taught drum clinics all around the world and several times at our Christian Musician Summit conferences. Tell us what topics you like to cover and teach to the worship drummers in the class?

[Zoro] Because there's so much to mastering one's instrument I teach on a variety of topics. Things such as time, technique, touch, tone, taste, vocabulary, and phrasing, are a lifetime study. I love to help drummers delve deeper into a variety of "feels", because all music is based on particular "feels" that are indicative to that music.

I have over fifteen thousand CDs in my music collection, thousands of albums, downloads, books and DVDS because I'm a passionate student of so many styles of music and its corresponding history. So, I love to share a multitude of musical concepts to try and inspire students to reach more of their potential and expand their horizons. The desire to learn





14" Groove Hats

anything and grow stems first and foremost from inspiration, so my goal as a teacher is simply to inspire. If a student is inspired they will naturally want to work harder to reach for that higher ground.

[WM] I know our readers would like to know what drum gear and other equipment you are currently using. Can you give us a run down your whole set up for us?

[Zoro] It's been an honor to play the best equipment in the world throughout my career because that gear has helped me to perform at the highest levels I am capable of. For that I am grateful. Here is that breakdown for you:

DW DRUMS – 4 PIECE MAPLE KIT:

- 1 - 16x22 Bass Drum
- 1 - 8x10 Tom Tom
- 1 - 13x16 Tom Tom
(Mounted floor tom from a stand)
- 1 - 6 1/2 x 14 Brass Snare Drum

SABIAN CYMBALS

- 14" HHX Groove Hats
- 21" HHX Groove Ride
- 2 - 19" HHX Legacy Crashes

EVANS DRUMHEADS

- Toms (Top) - G2 Clears
- Toms (Bottom) - G1 Clears
- Snare (Top) - G1 Coated
- Snare (Bottom) - Hazy 300

Bass Drum (Batter)

- EMAD Clear (With wider muffling ring)

Bass Drum (Front)

- EMAD Resonant with small hole cut out

4 - Evans EQ Pads

VIC FIRTH DRUMSTICKS

- Zoro (SZ) Signature model

BASS DRUM BEATERS

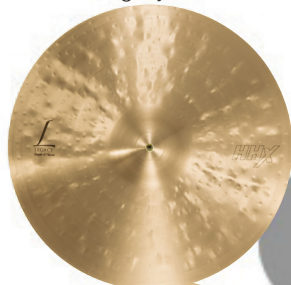
- Danmar Zoro Signature Square Felt Beater

SKB CASES

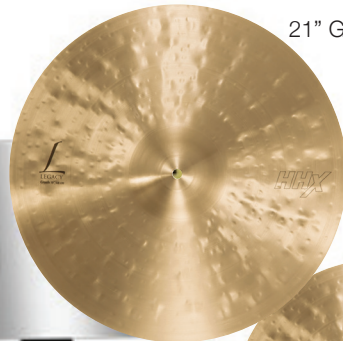
LATIN PERCUSSION

- 1 - LP 12" Drum Set Timbale,
Black Nickel (LP812-BN)
- 1 - LP 8" Micro Snare (LP848-SN)
- 1 - Mambo Cowbell (LP229)
- 1 - Bass Drum Cowbell

19" HHX Legacy Crash



21" Groove Ride



10"



14"

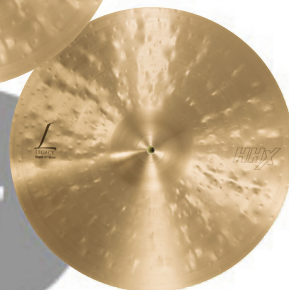


14" Groove Hats

16"



19" HHX Legacy Crash





Mounting Bracket (LP338)

- 1 - Jam Block, High Pitch - Blue (LP1205)
- 1 - Jam Block, Medium Pitch - Red (LP1207)
- 3 - Mount-All Percussion Brackets (LP236C)

AUDIX MICROPHONES

- 2 - D2'S – For Toms
- 1 - I-5 - For Snare Drum
- 1 - D6 –For Bass Drum
- 2 - AD X 51's – For Overheads
- 1 - SCX-1 – For Hi-Hat

PRESONUS MIXING CONSOLES

- 1 - Studio Live AR16 USB

64 AUDIO CUSTOM IN-EARS MONITORS N8

Nathan East Signature model.

THE WALKABOUT DRUM. Imagine an acoustic guitar body that has a pick-up in it that you play with your hands like a cajon and you have the



photo by Hannah Montez

Walkabout Drum, a revolutionary and versatile percussive instrument.

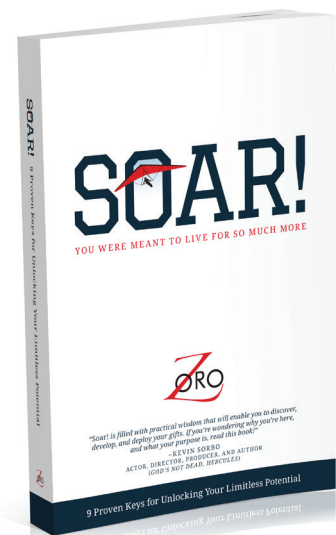
[WM] You have taught me how open and sharing the drum community is when it comes to showing others what you have learned. You have some instructional products for drummers too. Tell us about them?

[Zoro] I've written several drum books that were all intense labors of love and each took years to complete. *The Commandments of R&B Drumming: A Comprehensive Guide to Soul, Funk & Hip Hop*, *The Commandments of The Half-Time Shuffle*, and *The Commandments of Early Rhythm & Blues Drumming* with Daniel Glass.

I've never been motivated by money or created a product just to try to sell something and fill a niche in the market. I've only pursued what I was compelled to do. I would have written my books even if no one in the world read them except me. But I've been blessed that all of them were award winning and have become standards within the drum and music industry.

My goal as an educator is always the same: to make a positive impact with the knowledge, resources, and experiences I have been fortunate enough to acquire. Remember, what you don't give away, dies with you.

On the more motivational side, I wrote two life manuals to equip people with the tools needed





On the set of *The Tonight Show* with Jimmy Fallon and *The Roots*

to fulfill God’s calling on their life and to live out the dream in their hearts: *The Big Gig*; *Big-Picture Thinking for Success*, and *SOAR! 9 Proven Keys for Unlocking Your Limitless Potential*. Both took years to bring to fruition and with the exception of *SOAR!*, all of my books were published by Alfred Publishing.

[WM] You speak a lot about your mother and the influence she had on you even though you grew up in poverty much of the time. I know you have plans for book and a movie of your life story. What do you hope the book and film will do for readers and viewers?

[Zoro] Any positive overcoming story inspires us on a personal level because we all have a dream inside of us and at times we all feel like the underdog, so we can relate and sympathize with the protagonist. This is why we love movies like, *Rocky*, *The Blind Side*, *Rudy*, *Forest Gump*, *Secretariat*, *Invincible* and countless others

in that vein. My hope is that by sharing my story I will inspire people to never give up on the vision and dream God has given them, to persevere even in the worst of times, and to see the mighty hand of God at work through their faith. I’ve always had child like faith, and still do, and I refuse to relinquish my childlike heart, because in the day that I do the world will cease to amaze me. I believe with God all things are possible, and by looking to him and not at my circumstances I’ve seen him do the impossible in my life, from the very beginning to now. God is only moved by faith, not circumstance.

Next to food, clothing, and shelter, mankind survives through story. It is stories from the Holy Bible, great literature throughout history, and contemporary books of today that inspire us to rise up and overcome life’s challenges and defeat the enemy of our soul. Rudyard Kipling, the English author most known for *The Jungle Book*, stated, “Words are, of course,

the most powerful drug used by mankind.” It’s true. Nothing in the world changes us more than the power of words and those words are communicated and passed down through stories told in any medium we are exposed to, be it a movie, book, song, article, podcast, talk show, social media post or whatever other forum comes along.

[WM] Recently you were honored by Jimmy Fallon on the set of *The Tonight Show*. How did that come about?

[Zoro] It was another one of the countless God orchestrated moments of my life. Jimmy loves music and grew up a huge fan of all the artists I played with, and apparently a fan of mine. He asked me to sit in on the set of *The Tonight Show* on my birthday. After I finished performing my drum solo he gave me a huge hug and sang “Happy Birthday” to me on the drum riser, then led the entire studio audience

to sing along with him. It was epic and such a touching moment to be honored in this special way. Especially because I'm a huge fan of his as well and have been since his early *Saturday Night Live* days. It was a great way to celebrate my birthday with my wife and children in the audience to witness it.

[WM] Can you tell us about the most recent recording you've played on?

[Zoro] I just spent the last week in the studio with Lincoln Brewster recording his new Christmas album that will come out this fall. We had an absolute blast making God honoring music together and laughing up a storm because Lincoln has a great sense of humor and we both love to clown around. My wife Renée and I prayed before each session and so did Lincoln and I as well. So, I felt the anointing of God on me through each and every note. My

prayer was that I would be the instrument and that God would play me, and he did just that. I was just the vessel.

Lincoln was gracious enough to give me a two-minute funky New Orleans style drum solo on his ever-funky arrangement of "Jingle Bells." I played on every song and each arrangement is a gem featuring nothing but real live drums.

I honestly feel like this will be one of the best Christmas albums ever because Lincoln is such a gifted guitar player, singer, songwriter, producer, arranger and engineer. We did an ultra-funky version of the Vince Guaraldi Trio's "Linus and Lucy," the *Charlie Brown Christmas* theme that everyone knows. We also recorded killer versions of "Joy to The World," "The Little Drummer Boy," and "Angels We Have Heard On High." I love to play brushes and was able to play them on "I'll Be Home for Christmas,

and "O Come Let Us Adore Him."

"Miraculum" is an epic instrumental medley inspired by the Tran Siberian Orchestra and Lincoln's playing on it is ridiculous! When we play it live, it always brings the house down. I believe as we diligently practice and study our craft we should be getting better and better with each passing year, and I feel like what I played on Lincoln's album was one of my most inspired performances of my life. Of course, there's a reason for this.

Lincoln pulls the best out of me because he believes in me, loves me, honors me, and cheers me on as a drum fan and friend. Our confidence soars when we are around people who believe in what we carry and celebrate us. Lincoln and I talked for years about how great it would be to record together and live in the same place, and now we do. All I know is God

LINCOLN BREWSTER ON WORKING WITH ZORO

"It's not every day that you meet somebody like Zoro. He is truly one of the most unique and gifted people that I've ever had the pleasure of calling a friend. It's so rare to find someone who is fun, godly, passionate, loyal, authentic, funny, humble, encouraging of others and loves the church...and at the same time is also one of the best drummers on the planet!"

I recently had the pleasure of recording Zoro for an upcoming Christmas project and once again was blown away by his level of musicianship. He is truly world-class and has a drum voice that is all his own. Not only was I impacted by his playing but also just getting to spend a few days with him in the studio. Every day he showed up thankful and excited and was consistently willing to do whatever it took to get the best take. He would come in and pray before every session that God's hand would be on our work. I simply can't say enough great things about the guy. He's the real deal, a true legend!"

~ Lincoln Brewster



is good, and that I feel blessed by his friendship and by the many others at Bayside who've befriended me. I am really having the time of my life!

[WM] You beat the odds and went from a little boy with his street-corner drums and living in a car with your family, to an internationally renowned rock star we know and love as Zoro the Drummer. Your faith in God helped to direct your steps. What advice do you have for worship musicians everywhere?

[Zoro] The same advice I would give to people everywhere regardless of what they do. Serve God with all your heart, trust him in the dark times when it feels you've lost your way and others have left you for dead, be courageous, work hard, and always walk by faith because faith is the only thing that pleases God.

Do everything with a spirit of excellence as if you are doing it for the Lord himself and live in a way that glorifies and honors him. Take the gifts and talents God has given you and turn them into a masterpiece that is used for his purposes. Then, most importantly, remain a humble servant because pride so often accompanies any sense of human accomplishment.

Examine your life and ask yourself daily "whose life is getting better because I'm alive and whose benefitting from my gifts and talents?" Remember, we don't get any bonus points because we're gifted or talented because God has given that to everyone. It's just that many have not acknowledged that or discovered theirs.

In the end, the only thing that will matter is whether or not we've used what we have for God's glory and whether or not it was a blessing to people. I've been given the spiritual gifts of an encourager, teacher, evangelist and musician, but one day God will ask me to give an account of how I used them.

Knowing I'll be judged for all he has entrusted unto me, I choose to live from that eternal



At Bayside after a performance with Brian King Joseph (America's Got Talent) and Lincoln Brewster

perspective which governs my day to day affairs and compels me to do my best work while I still can. Psalm 90:12 says, "Teach me to number my days that I may apply my heart to wisdom." Look, our days are numbered for sure, but our good deeds are not. The final count is left up to us and I want to make every moment count because there are so few of them in the span of a human life. I want to lead as many people as possible to a relationship with Jesus Christ and be a positive and encouraging influence to all who come across my path.

I've discovered there's only two ways to live your life. You will either live a life of self or service—seek to serve, because there is no other way to a sense of purpose and fulfillment. I am confident of is this: God rewards our

faithfulness, but loyalty can only be proven under a test and he allows us to go through many wilderness seasons to see who will remain steadfast in order to see who is trustworthy for greater assignments.

Two of the most impactful words ever spoken to me came from Pastor Ray Johnston last December when I played at the Bayside Christmas Extravaganza. This occurred right after it was official that I was coming on staff. As soon as he saw me he said with a gleam in his eye and a smile on his face, "Welcome Home!" Then he gave me a big hug.

It was only two words, but they touched my heart profoundly and I was tearing up inside because I have not always been received

with open arms from the religious community. So often I've been shunned, misjudged, misperceived, and mistreated based on my outward appearance, and many never looked past their religious judgments to see what was in my heart and that was always heartbreaking.

Ray's loving and welcoming words felt like a reward from God for being faithful and for not allowing myself to become bitter and jaded through the trials and tribulations, and the self-righteousness and piety of others. The best advice I can offer to anyone is stay the course and trust God, for He sees everything and in due time He blesses those who boldly proclaim His name. It is His promise. ◇



photo by Hannah Montez