

Pastors vs. Musicians

Mike Pilavachi

An extract taken from Christian Musician Magazine on the harmony between control & creativity.

Mike Pilavachi discusses the tension between a musician's creativity and a pastor's control.

Creativity, in its truest sense, is the activity of the Holy Spirit. So Christian musicians should have a head start on anyone else because they have the Holy Spirit's creativity. And yet in the church we struggle with giving expression to creativity. The church is possibly the most conservative institution on the face of the earth. I'm not speaking politically or socially, but in the sense that we just don't like change. As for pastors, speaking as a pastor, sometimes creativity threatens us because we are not in control of the creativity. The whole thing about creativity is that we're not meant to be in control. So there's this whole "war" between the pastors and the musicians. Pastors think of musicians as undisciplined, egocentric, out to do their own thing. And musicians feel as though pastors are controlling, demanding, and that they never encourage them. And in disputes between pastors and musicians it's always the musicians that come out worse. The pastor's got the clout.

One of the things that I've been so sad to see all over the world is musicians on the fringe of the church carrying so much pain. For many musicians church has become the most uncomfortable place to be. Then as pastors, we wonder why some musicians get into trouble and fall into sin. And we say, "Ah, you see? Everything I said about him turned out to be true." Actually we've driven them to the edge. There's something in them that knows that their creativity is given by God, and they can't really worship God unless they use their creative gifts. And yet when they do, we tend to marginalize it. We also don't allow musicians to make mistakes.

Now, I work with Matt Redman, and I was his youth pastor when he was thirteen years old, so we've sort of grown up together. I remember when he started developing his musical gifts and leading worship. I remember that we talked about learning to be spontaneous musically in the worship setting. So he tried it a few times, and it didn't go well in the beginning. He crash-landed. And I'd go up to him afterwards and say, "Matt you did this wrong, you did that wrong." "Matt, you must not do that." "What on earth were you thinking when you did that?" He took it for ages, and then one day, he turned to me, and really quietly he said, "Mike, I don't thrive under criticism." And it just stopped me. Of course he doesn't thrive under criticism. No one does. Another time, when he'd tried to be spontaneous and it didn't really work, I said to him, "Matt, maybe we shouldn't try this spontaneous thing too much." Matt said, "But Mike, you were the one who told me to try it. If I'm ever going to get it right, if I'm ever going to learn how to do that, we've got to accept that at the beginning I'm going to get it wrong. And it was like, "Of course!" I wish that as pastors we gave our musicians more freedom to make mistakes. If only we could love them unconditionally, then we'd have the right to speak into their lives, because they'd know that we're doing it because we love them, and not because we want to control them.

I want to encourage musicians and worship leaders: I know that the church has hurt you. Don't give up on the church. The church needs you. God wants you as part of his church. For all its faults it's his church, and we'd be the poorer without you. We need musicians to hang in there, and to slowly help pastors to let go and trust. Perhaps you should actually say to your pastors, "I want to be under your authority. I want you to let me know when I've made a mistake, but tell me kindly, and encourage me too." As someone who loves worship, I'd love to see more musicians using their gifts in worship in the context of the church. We've got bands like Delirious? Who are using their gifts to bring worship to the streets, as it were. That's important, but we also need those who bring worship to the temple.

In the Old Testament, they took such great care with the musicians and the instruments and created great worship. And in the history of the church for the first few centuries, the church was at the forefront of new music. The Gregorian chants, for example, were cutting edge, chart-topping music in their day. But we just stuck with that. Luther and Wesley took the tunes from the songs being sung in the bars and put Christian words to them. General William Booth, who founded the Salvation Army, was doing very innovative music for his times. Much of the church has held on to those traditions. And sometimes, those things can become a stumbling block to allowing us to be creative today. Every move of the Holy Spirit in the history of the church has included fresh

creativity in music and in worship. I want to encourage - and it's already starting - more and more pastors and leaders to recognize that there's something of God in the creativity of their musicians, and to make space for it.