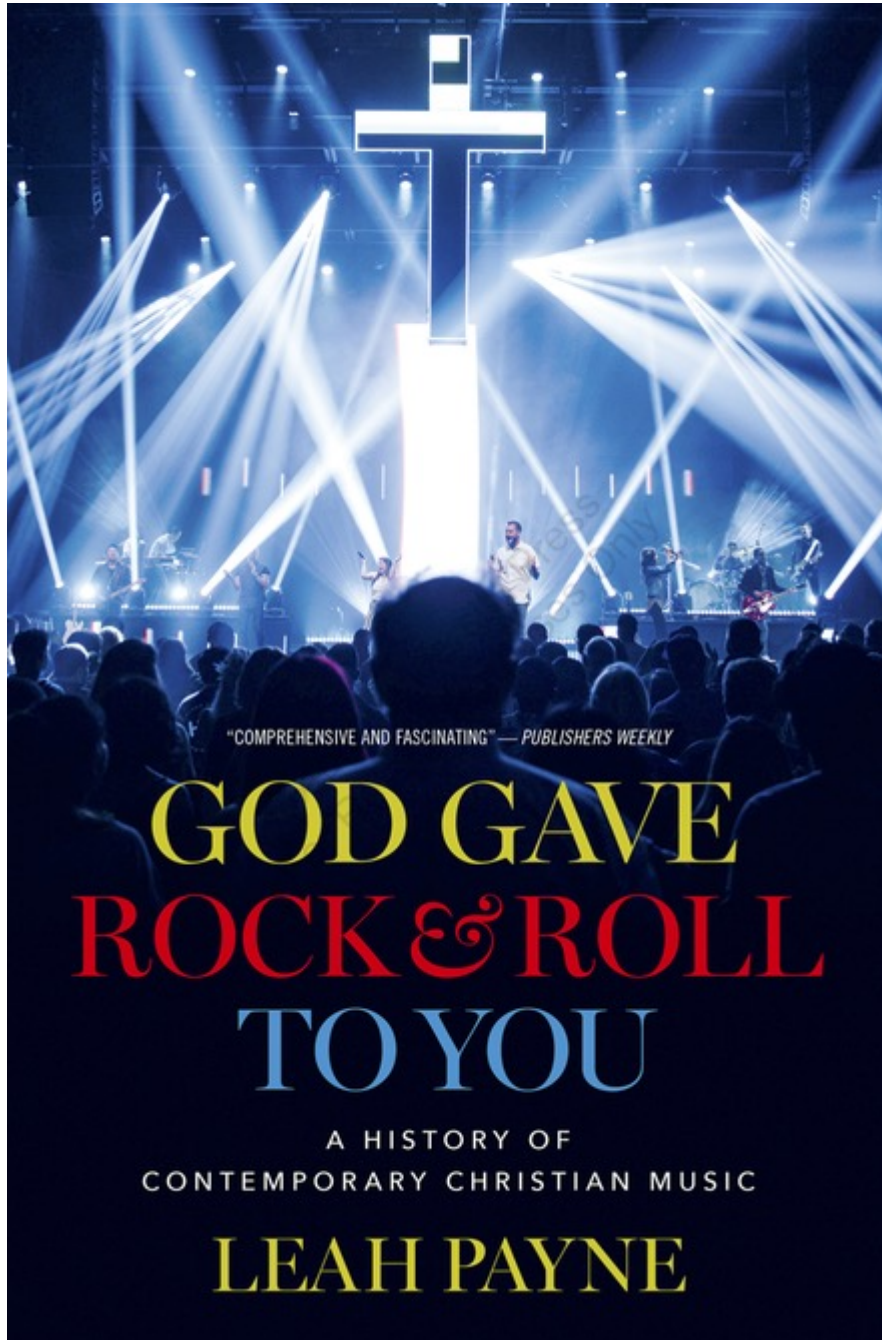


Concerned Christian mums rock

Description

MMHS resident and prog rock podcaster Revd John Simms reviews *God Gave Rock And Roll To You: A History Of Contemporary Christian Music* by Leah Payne (Oxford University Press)



Like many other retired Methodist ministers – from singing hymns in chapel to attending festivals – music has always been an important part of my life.

While exploring the Christian faith in the early 80s, one of the questions with which I struggled was – could I continue to enjoy the music I had done in the 70s? It was in that context that I discovered the theme of this book by Leah Payne.

The author picks up the rise of ‘celebrity’ CCM artists like Amy Grant and Larry

Norman

Although published by a British company, this study explores contemporary Christian music – or CCM – from an American perspective. But the ubiquity of popular music makes it just as relevant to the UK context.

Leah Payne sees CCM as the kind of music that concerned Christian mums – usually evangelicals – would purchase for their kids to encourage them to stay ‘in the faith’ while still having some semblance of ‘cool’.

In the ‘ghetto’ world of Christian TV, radio and publishing – that seeks to protect Christians from ‘the world’ – this was seen as vital for protecting the upcoming generation from the wiles of ‘the world, the flesh and the devil’.

Payne traces the history of CCM from its roots in late 19th century revival camp meetings, through providing alternatives to the burgeoning rock and roll scene, the influences on church life of the Jesus Movement in the 70s and the rise of the pop stars of the 80s and beyond.

She picks up the rise of ‘celebrity’ CCM artists like Amy Grant, Michael W Smith, Larry Norman and Sandy Patty, and bands such as Petra and DC Talk. Payne then charts the emergence of ‘celebrity’ worship leaders who take the place of CCM acts in predominantly white, middle class, conservative, evangelical music.

Payne makes a link between the discipleship needs of the music and its political role over such matters as ‘purity culture’ and abortion, and the strengthening links from the 80s onwards between US evangelicals and the Republican Party – at times conflating the spiritual battle with George W Bush’s ‘war on terror’, for example. I don’t think we’d find many examples in the contemporary Methodist Church of the UK of this!

It’s well-researched and academic without being stuffy

I found this book an informative read. It’s well-researched and academic without being stuffy. However, one thing that struck me were the omissions.

For someone who was a keen devourer of CCM in the mid-80s, I was somewhat taken aback by the lack of mentions of musicians like Phil Keaggy – allegedly hailed as the greatest guitarist in the world by none other than Jimi Hendrix.

In the contemporary ‘progressive’ scene – with which I am particularly familiar – the book fails to mention the likes of Iona co-founder Dave Bainbridge and Neal Morse, formerly of Spock’s Beard.

Morse has written extensively about his evangelical faith, and has what many might see as a ‘typical’ conversion story – just the sort of thing the concerned ‘book store mums’ would be looking for.

Category

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