



Since the days when primitive men first used sticks to beat out messages on hollow logs, every great "Movement" in history has come with its own Soundtrack. "When words fail, music speaks." [Hans Christian Anderson]

In 1910, Joe Hill, the "Troubadour of Discontent," was a well-known martyr and labor folk hero with the *Industrial Workers of the World*. He correctly observed, "You make a speech and people forget about it the next day. You put the information in a leaflet and people hold onto it for a week and throw it away. But if you write a song, and put that information in a song, people hear it, remember it and sing it: it lives on."

The music of the *Suffrage Movement* at the beginning of the 20th Century featured original lyrics that were sung to popular, often patriotic tunes of the day such

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as "Yankee Doodle" and "When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again." Original music, like Dame Ethel Smyth's famous anthem of the movement, "The March of the Women," served to galvanize those who, in political and religious circles, were denied a voice.

When, in June of 1911, L.A. Police told them that "Votes for Women" speeches were prohibited, the Suffragists set their speeches to music and sang their gospel instead.

Songs of the *American Labor Movement* called for just wages, dignity and a fair shake. They voiced grievances, affirmed the value of the worker to society and expressed hope for life in a more just world. Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Joe Glazer, the Almanac Singers and more, chronicle the history of the American Labor Movement in song.

America's *Civil Rights Movement*, singing a collective "We Shall Overcome," wove Gospel and Jazz into its own, plaintive voice. From Sam Cook singing "A Change is Gonna Come" to Odetta's "Oh, Freedom," the voice of pain expressed itself in more songs than may ever be known.

The *United Farm Worker's Movement*, with César Chávez and Dolores Huerta, offered songs that spoke of the People's heroes, Benito Juárez and Emiliano Zapata. Under their banner of "*¡Si, se puede!*" (Yes, we can!), they spread the word through songs like "El

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Picket Sign," "*¡Viva la Revolución!*" and "*La Peregrinación.*" (The Pilgrimage)

In most cases, composers and lyricists are so obscure that we know nothing about them other than their names. They are only remembered because of their connection with the Movement that gave them wings and a song.

Esoteric voices known only by historians, collectors and PBS documentarians, their music helped propel the masses by binding them together under their common banner.

One of the recurring themes of all such crusades was a focus on crucial matters of equity, justice and social reform. Those issues informed their doctrine and rhetoric, spilling over into the lyrical content of their songs. Focused on "speaking truth to power," their intentions were to influence the thinking and behavior of the "Powers That Be."

But the *Jesus Movement*, starting in 1968, was an entirely different kettle of fish. With doctrines of Justification, Regeneration and Reconciliation, the "Jesus People" focused on becoming "salt and light," changing the world around them via Christ within them.

While other movements depended on political and social *pressure* to facilitate change, the Jesus Movement depended on *surrender* to a Divine Plan.

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There is argument about whether *the Jesus Movement* was an actual revival or just another cultural ripple that eventually went the way of all religious fads. I make no apology for being convinced that the Jesus Movement was a unique dispensation of God's grace telling the world, "I am still here. I still love you."

It wasn't by accident that it all started in the most populous, and most culturally influential, County in America: Los Angeles.

In 1968, Evangelicals began reaching out to counterculture youth then flooding into Southern California by the tens of thousands. Among these were David Berg's "Teens for Christ" in Huntington Beach, Arthur Blessitt's "His Place" and Don Williams' "Salt Company" coffeehouses, both in Los Angeles.

Carrying the message of the Movement were bands like Sunrise, Joy, Kentucky Faith, New River and Crossroads; Love Song, True Light, Freedom and Children of Light; The Celebration, Kindergarten and Heaven and Earth.

One band who shared the stage with all of them, as well as Larry Norman, Randy Stonehill and Dennis Agajanian, was the Southern California power-trio, Agăpē.

Chronicling the Soundtrack of *the Jesus Movement*, historians recorded the band's relevance to that moment in time.

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“The Los Angeles area band, Agape (pronounced uh-GAH-pay) was certainly one of the first Jesus Rock bands, and its story was prototypical of many groups that would spring up in later years all across the country.” [*God’s Forever Family*, Larry Eskridge]

“The Jesus Movement looked to already existing forms of communication. Alternative Christian newspapers became popular. Dance, drama, mime and other media were used. And, in perhaps the most lasting development, the Jesus movement turned to rock music. Modern Jesus music was invented and artists such as Agape and the All Saved Freak Band burst on the scene.” [*The Liturgical Renewal Movement*, John W. Riggs]

“While the Beatles communed with the Maharishi and practiced Transcendental Meditation, radio stations adopted Jesus Rock formats featuring groups such as Love Song, Agape and the All Saved Freak Band.” [*American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon*, Stephen R. Prothero]

“To many churches and religious leaders, the Jesus Movement was a threat. As soon as the first, few bands – the All Saved Freak Band, Agape and Love Song, along with solo artists such as Larry Norman and Randy Stonehill hit the scene, preachers rose up to call them twisted.” [*Raised By Wolves: The Story of Christian Rock & Roll*, John J. Thompson and Dinah K. Kotthoff]

Circulating those quotes among former band members, I was curious about whether or not they were aware of them. They were as surprised by the information as I was by the response.

"Do you believe it?" I was asked.

"Believe what?" I responded. "Do I believe what the Jesus Music historians said about Agape?"

"Yeah. Do you believe it? Do you think it's true?"

Moved by the humility and gentle honesty of their questions, I reflected on the idea that band members may have never considered any notion of a legitimate "legacy."

Distracted by the dark clouds that eventually overshadowed their joy, reminiscing brought too much pain, too much sorrow. So, they simply stopped paying attention.

Agape isn't remembered because they were the best musicians, wrote the best songs or made the biggest splash. They are remembered because *they were there*; because they were verified eyewitnesses to a great Movement; because they carried the banner of the Cross on the frontlines of the battle.

And, also, because they were *very* loud. While other emerging "Jesus Music" bands busied themselves with beautiful melodies and emotionally evocative

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harmonies, Agape shocked people with their unapologetically raw, Rock 'n Roll edge.

“They played Jesus rock at its crustiest – music which cut through the thickest defenses of the non-Christian rock fans. For those to whom hard rock music was language, Agape spoke clearly.” [*Classic Christian Rockzine*, Fred Edmonson]

In their youth, they gambled on Jesus and “cast their bread upon the waters.” Fifty years later, without their knowledge or consent, it was all coming back to them, “good measure, pressed down and running over.”

The story of Agape is a story of beginnings; the *Genesis of a Genre*. It’s a story about the birth of a vision, planted in the “sons and daughters” of Joel’s prophecy, that has now influenced three generations for Christ.

It’s a tale about “the days of old” and the birth of Christian Rock, when minstrels became messengers and the Word became flesh once again.

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