

The Lord Works in a Strange Way

An Interview with Corey Smith

By Tom Crenshaw, tom@RockOm.net

Corey Smith definitely has a fire of unconventional conviction in him. You can hear this faith, as he describes it, “a calling to be honest and real,” in his music and can witness it at sold-out shows across the country. Smith’s incredibly energetic live shows, combined with clever, well-crafted lyrics and a soulful Southern voice has earned him an enthusiastic legion of fans. Smith says, “It really starts with a song. It’s just about writing songs that, for one reason or another, connect with people and impact their lives.”

Smith’s roots are in rural Jefferson, Georgia but his dreams of becoming a singer-songwriter were fueled by the diversity and sounds of nearby Athens, Georgia. Smith has long since paid his dues penning such anthem-style, crowd rousing sing-a-longs like “Twenty-One,” “I’m Not Gonna Cry,” and “The Wreckage.”

Smith has taken full advantage of the internet - or you might say the internet has taken advantage of him. His music is readily available for fans, old and new to download and even share without too much concern for profitability. Smith explains it this way, “I get asked if I mind when someone burns my music. I’m just flattered that people want to.”

In July 2008 Smith released his fifth album - a six-song EP recorded live at The Georgia Theatre in his adopted hometown of Athens, GA. As you’ll hear in the [podcast](#) accompanying these brief interview excerpts, 2009 finds Smith writing new songs for yet another CD due out in the fall, which is sure to keep him touring well into the future and continuing on in his much deserved success.

RockOm: I’ve read where as you were growing up you loved singing gospel. You still enjoy singing gospel?

Corey Smith: I think I sing gospel music. I think my music is very religious, especially the stuff I write now. It’s not what you would normally hear in church, but it’s my form of gospel. I grew up in a fundamental Southern Baptist home, raised largely by my grandparents. The church had a big impact on me; it was where I learned how to sing and where I was first exposed to live music through the church choir. It was probably my bedrock as a musician. Later on, a lot of the things that I learned to listen to was in reaction to that. As I got older I didn’t want anything to do with gospel or country music because it was what my parents and grandparents listen to. I wanted to rock. In high school I was listening to alternative music, all the 90’s rock, and gangster rap and such. But it was largely a reaction against my upbringing.

RockOm: Tell me about that spark, that line, melody or lyric that suddenly appears in your head and starts a new song.

Corey Smith: It’s euphoric and very spiritual. At some point in the writing process when I feel like I’ve got the spark, that the song is on its way, I’ll say a silent prayer, just like “Thank you.” I do believe that for me the music comes from God. My whole experience as a musician is a part of a much longer, deeper relationship with God. It’s not traditional; it’s a much different relationship than I thought I would ever have [with God] as a kid. It’s something that goes beyond what I learned in church. To me, even the songs that have cussing in them and are about raunchy things - it’s still God. My calling is to be honest and real and sometimes it’s hard for people to listen, but I try to stay focused when I’m writing on not censoring myself so much. For me, now, it’s really largely about the music letting the melody dictate what the song is going to be [about]. Having the music parts, to me, those are the parts that get me excited. When I hear the melody that’s when I feel like I’m really channeling something. Then I’ll let the melody inspire an emotion or mood or idea that will then turn into the words.

The entirety of RockOm’s interview with Corey Smith can be heard at the [RockOm.net podcast](#) for the week of May 28, 2009.

www.coreysmith.com