

CREATIVE MESSENGERS

Westfield-based Keynote and its artists make their mark around the world

By Kevin Kane
Current in Westfield

It wasn't fame or fortune that attracted Scott Naylor to life as a full-time musician. Instead, he hoped his talents could be used for a greater purpose, and that's what brought him to Westfield.

Naylor works as one of Keynote's many musical artists. The organization calls Westfield home but serves as the international headquarters of creative communications for Campus Crusade for Christ, one of the largest Christian mission organizations in the world. With more than 40 divisions around the world, CCC relies on Keynote to help its ministries better reach their respective target audiences. This is mainly done out of an office and recording facility on Union Street, where Keynote creates music, movies and new media to be distributed throughout the country, and around the world.

The distribution, though, often includes sending Keynote's performers on both national and international tours. Currently, the organization has four musical acts - including Naylor's group Blue Sky Nine - staff filmmakers, and even a ventriloquist comedian.

Naylor may not be a rock star, but the former IT consultant turned musician is perhaps closer than he ever imagined. He was performing at his own church and college campus before joining Keynote, which has since sent him all over the globe.

"It's definitely a lot different," he said. "I've played on four continents now."

The long-distance travel wasn't the only adjustment Naylor had to make though. Because Keynote works to introduce people to their own spirituality, Naylor said Blue Sky Nine concerts are sometimes much different from those of other bands. Just last week, for example, the group toured throughout Kansas performing for inmates inside penitentiaries.

Blue Sky Nine uses those performances to present the messages of the gospel in a way that each specific audience will find relatable. Naylor said Blue Sky, and Keynote's other musicians, shouldn't be considered Christian groups, though. Their respective messages stem from the Bible but their music is much like what one would hear at any other concert.

"Our faith is not the subject of our art; it's the canvas for it," he said.

Naylor added that the band's selection of acoustic rocks songs includes covers of mainstream hits by artists such as John Mayer in addition to original tunes. As long as the song has the right message and asks its listeners the right questions, the group will play it.



MORE THAN MUSIC

"Music has worked well but we're looking for whatever works best at a given time," said Keynote Marketing Director Paul Smith. Short films and new media are the latest additions to Keynote's repertoire, and Smith said the latter is taking off "like wildfire." One of the organization's latest creations is an iPhone app called God Tools, which provides digital booklets containing scripture, articles and other references.



Submitted Photos
Keynote's various musical groups and performers may rehearse and record in Westfield, but they often take their talents on the road, performing all over the country and overseas. Blue Sky Nine performed at prisons in Kansas last week, will travel to Romania next week and is shown here playing at Ft. Knox in Kentucky.

GATHERING SUPPORT

All staff members, from musicians to receptionists, must first establish a donor base, or community members willing to sponsor them, in order to fund their respective positions. After the initial work to find sponsors, Smith said the benefit is that Keynote staff members can devote all of their time and talents to mission work instead of limiting it to weekends and free time. Smith added that Keynote is currently looking to add staff members.

That thinking reflects Keynote's entire approach to evangelical ministry. Marketing Director Paul Smith said the organization's foundation comes from a passage in the Bible, Acts 17, in which the Apostle Paul finds common ground with people in Athens in order to effectively present his message. Keynote uses ever-changing means to do the same thing today, Smith said.

Whether it's through a comedy act, short film or organic rap music, Keynote uses whatever creative forms it believes will help CCC get its message to the world.

"We take it to people and in ways that they can relate to it and receive it," Smith said.

Approaching the topic tactfully and creatively, Naylor said, helps ensure the ministry's message appeals to a larger audience and is better received, but in addition to being more effective, this method also provides opportunities. Working at Keynote

allows the organization's staff members to utilize their creative abilities and interests while answering a higher calling. It allows artists like Naylor to do what they want for a living while still serving a valuable purpose, and that's why Naylor said he's glad he switched careers.

"We're taking God-given talents and using them to serve the one they came from," he said. "That's pretty cool."

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

To learn more about Keynote and its Westfield recording and performance facility, East Street Studios, visit www.keynote.org.