Contemporary Christian music (or CCM—and occasionally "inspirational music") is a genre of modern popular music which is lyrically focused on matters concerned with the Christian faith. It formed as those affected by the 1960s Jesus movement revival began to express themselves in a more contemporary style of music than the hymns, Gospel and Southern gospel music that was prevalent in the church at the time. Today, the term is typically used to refer to pop, rock, or praise & worship styles.

It has representation on several music charts including Billboard's Christian Albums, Christian Songs, Hot Christian AC (Adult Contemporary), Christian CHR, Soft AC/Inspirational, and Christian Digital Songs as well as the UK's Official Christian & Gospel Albums Chart. Top-selling CCM artists will also appear on the Billboard 200. In the iTunes Store, the genre is represented as part of the Christian and gospel genre.[1]

History

The growing popularity in the styles of Rock 'n' Roll music in the 1950s was initially dismissed by the church because it was believed to encourage sinfulness. Yet as evangelical churches adapted to appeal to more people, the musical styles used in worship changed as well by adopting the sounds of this popular style.[2]

The genre became known as contemporary Christian music as a result of the Jesus movement revival in the latter 1960s and early 1970s,[3][4] and was originally called Jesus music.[5] "About that time, many young people from the sixties' counterculture professed to believe in Jesus. Convinced of the bareness of a lifestyle based on drugs, free sex, and radical politics, 'hippies' became 'Jesus people'".[6] However, there were people who felt that Jesus was another "trip".[6] It was during the 1970s Jesus movement that Christian music started to become an industry within itself.[7] "Jesus Music" started by playing instruments and singing songs about love and peace, which then translated into love of God. Paul Wohlegemuth, who wrote the book Rethinking Church Music, said “[the] 1970s will see a marked acceptance of rock-influenced music in all levels of church music. The rock style will become more familiar to all people, its rhythmic excesses will become refined, and its earlier secular associations will be less remembered.”[8]

Larry Norman is often remembered as the "father of Christian rock", because of his early contributions (before the Jesus movement) to the developing new genre that mixed rock rhythms with the Christian messages.[9] Though his style was not initially well received by many in the Christian community of the time, he continued throughout his career to create controversial hard-rock songs such as "Why Should the Devil Have All the Good Music?".[9] He is remembered as the artist "who first combined rock 'n' roll with Christian lyrics" in the Gospel Music Hall of Fame.[9] Though there were Christian albums in the 1960s that contained contemporary-sounding songs, there were two albums recorded in 1969 that are considered to be the first complete albums of "Jesus rock": Upon This Rock (1969) by Larry Norman initially released on Capitol Records,[10] and Mylon – We Believe by Mylon LeFevre, released by Cotillion, which was LeFevre's attempt at blending gospel music with southern rock.[11][12] Unlike traditional or southern gospel music, this new Jesus music was birthed out

The genre emerged and became prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s.[20] Beginning in July 1978, CCM Magazine began covering “Contemporary Christian Music” artists and a wide range of spiritual themes until it launched online publications in 2009.[21][22]

It has certain themes and messages behind the songs and their lyrics including Praise and worship, faith, encouragement, and prayer.[23] These songs also focus on themes of devotion, inspiration, redemption, reconciliation, and renewal.[24] Many people listen to contemporary Christian music for comfort through tough times. The lyrics and messages conveyed in CCM songs are aimed to evangelize and to worship Jesus.[25] One of the earliest goals of CCM was to spread the news of Jesus to non-Christians.[26] In addition, contemporary Christian music also strengthens the faith of believers.[27]

**Style and artists**

Contemporary Christian music has influences from folk, gospel, pop and rock music.[28] Genres of music such as soft rock, folk rock, alternative, hip-hop, etc. have played a large influence on CCM.[29]

Charismatic churches have had a large influence on contemporary Christian music and are one of the largest producers of CCM. Hillsong Church is one of the many prominent CCM artists.[30] Contemporary Christian music has also expanded into many subgenres,[25] Christian punk, Christian hardcore, Christian metal, and Christian hip hop, although not normally considered CCM, can also come under the genre's umbrella. [31] Contemporary worship music is also incorporated in modern CCM. Contemporary worship is both recorded and performed during church services.

Some prominent artists who assisted CCM to become popular include Amy Grant, Michael W. Smith, Phil Keaggy and John Elefante.[25] Several mainstream artists, such as The Byrds, Bob Dylan, Van Morrison, Elvis Presley, Creed, Lifehouse and U2, have dealt with Christian themes in their music, yet are not part of the CCM industry.[31] Other artists representing the genre include MercyMe, Casting Crowns, Jeremy Camp, Third Day, Matthew West, tobyMac, Chris Tomlin, Brandon Heath, Aaron Shust, and Lauren Daigle. Historically, Jars of Clay, dc Talk, Steven Curtis Chapman and Newsboys have also belonged to this genre.

**Controversy**

Contemporary Christian music has been a topic of controversy in various ways since its beginnings in the 1960s.[31] The Christian college Bob Jones University discourages its dormitory students from listening to CCM.[32] Others simply find the concept of Christian pop/rock music to be an unusual phenomenon, since rock music has historically been associated with themes such as sexual promiscuity, rebellion, drug and alcohol use, and other topics normally considered antithetical to the teachings of Christianity.[31] This controversy caused by evangelical pop music was explored by Gerald Clarke in his Time magazine article "New Lyrics for the Devil's Music". [33]

Some writers from the Reformed Presbyterian tradition assert that the inclusion of CCM in a worship service violates the second commandment and the Regulative Principle of Worship because it adds man-made inventions, lyrics and instrumental music to the biblically appointed way of worshipping God.[34]

Contemporary Christian musicians and listeners have sought to extend it into settings where religious music traditionally might not be heard.[35] MercyMe's song "I Can Only Imagine" was a crossover success despite having a clear Christian message.[35]

Paul Baker, author of Contemporary Christian Music, addressed the question, "Is the music a ministry, or is it entertainment? The motives, on both sides, were nearly always sincere and well intentioned, rarely malicious."

"The responsibility of the church is not to provide escape from reality," according to Donald Ellsworth, the author of Christian Music in Contemporary Witness, "but to give answers to contemporary problems through legitimate, biblical means."[37]

Many studies on church growth show that churches have grown in size after changing the style of music.[38] James Emery White, a consultant for preaching and worship within the Southern Baptist Convention, made a statement about how many churches that changed styles to using more contemporary Christian music, appeared to have a quicker growth.[39]
Growth

The contemporary Christian music industry has grown over the years. Album sales have increased from 31 million in 1996 to 44 million sales in 2000. Since EMI's purchase of Sparrow Records, sales have increased 100 percent. However, the main goal of the label continues to be aspiring to make a positive impact on the world through contemporary Christian music. The company has given back money to the CCM community.[40]

See also

- Christian alternative rock
- Christian hip hop
- Christian metal
- Christian rock
- Contemporary worship music
- Hearitfirst.com
- Korean Contemporary Christian music
- Latin Christian music
- Neues Geistliches Lied

Notes

1. ^ In the US iTunes store, the section is entitled Christian & Gospel. In the UK iTunes store, it's Gospel. Canada's and Australia's iTunes section is entitled Inspirational.
7. ^ a b Powell, Mark Allan (2002). Encyclopedia of Contemporary Christian Music. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers. p. 10. ISBN 1-56563-679-1. "By the '80s, the special-interest network that Jesus music had spawned had developed into a multimillion-dollar industry. Contemporary Christian music had its own magazines, radio stations, and award shows. The Jesus movement revival was over."
Further reading