

# LEELAND LOVE IS ON THE MOVE

GRAMMY-nominated progressive rock act Leeland has been known to deliver songwriting beyond its years and worshipful rock so genuine it disarms the honest cynic. Often quoted as one of Christian music's most gripping live bands, the 2006 debut *Sound of Melodies* and 2008's *Opposite Way* quickly established Leeland as a leader in the worship community and beyond. While both previous albums were GRAMMY nominated and drew a combined eight Dove nominations, Leeland's measure of success has always been the human heart. And now Leeland's third album, *Love Is On The Move* is a landmark in the deepest sense.

"During the past year, God has caused a total shift in our thinking and the way we approach our ministry," says Leeland keyboardist Jack Mooring. His brother, the band's principal songwriter, lead singer and guitarist, Leeland Mooring begins to explain, "For awhile, we were just this band from Baytown, Texas, and all we saw was our little church where God had been doing awesome and incredible things. But He's really been opening our vision to all the hurting people, especially the poor, around the world and making it clear we should help by being a part of spreading His kingdom." Leeland goes on to quote from 1 John 3:18, "Let us not love with words or tongue but with actions... [NIV]," and he profoundly states: "If we're not loving people, then we're just making a bunch of noise." That's quite a statement coming from a leader who's influencing a new generation of worshipers. And that's precisely the point. "We don't want to sing another song if we're not taking care of the poor. If we're not being the hands and feet of Jesus, we might as well just stop making records and go home," says Jack.

This very idea is the heart behind Leeland's new project. With passion and conviction Leeland has transformed its sound into a call to action; asking followers of Christ to be the hands and feet of God.

"Worship, justice and action are not separate," explains 21-year-old Leeland. "They are united. They work together. When you have an amazing encounter with God and you experience His love during worship, the fruit of that should be your life overflowing with action and love – justice – to the world around you. ... That's why Jesus said [in Matthew 25] on the Day of Judgment people will say, 'God, when did I ever see you naked, or hungry, or thirsty or in jail?' And He'll say, 'Whatever you did for the least of these, you did for me,' and to others God will say, 'Whatever you did not do for the least of these, you did not do for Me.'"

The shift in Leeland's mission has been moving in this direction since the group's formation in 2004 with "Tears of the Saints," the socially conscious single off Leeland's debut, *Sound of Melodies*. The band's quest for insight continued as they befriended renowned teenage abolitionist Zach Hunter, toured with activist-rockers Third Day, collaborated with social justice advocate Michael W. Smith (Leeland, a prolific songwriter, had writing credits on seven songs on Smith's 2006 album *Stand.*), partnered with Christian relief organization Food for the Hungry, took outreach trips to Africa and Asia, and attended Hillsong Church's 2008 Conference in Australia.

The Hillsong experience set the tone for the worshipful anthems and prayers which elevate *Love Is On The Move*. "One of the speakers at the conference spoke about worship and justice," Leeland recalls. "After his message, he played a clip of Bono giving an acceptance speech for an award he received for the work he's been doing with Africa. And Bono actually started preaching and saying, 'God is with the poor and with the needy, and if we want to be with God, we need to follow Him to the poor--where the poor play house inside of cardboard boxes.'" He just went off. It was very anointed and it ministered to me a lot."

Leeland immediately exited the room and began writing song lyrics. "I ran out to the hallway with this melody in my head," he says. "The whole chorus came right away." And thus "Follow You," a heart-felt pledge was born. By the time the song made it into the recording studio, it was clear to everyone involved "Follow You" was a song that was sure to move people to action.

Soon Leeland extended an invitation to its good friend Brandon Heath, GMA's Male Vocalist of the Year, to appear as a special guest on the inspiring psalm. When Heath sings, "All my needs You have supplied / When I was dead You gave me life / How could I not give it away so freely / I'll follow You into the homes of the broken," the conviction is so clear. "We're on the same page with each other," explains Jack. "Brandon's heart, like ours, is focused on being about action."

To helm production for *Love Is On The Move*, Leeland – which also features the Mooring’s cousin Jake Holtz (bass) and long-time friend Mike Smith (drums) – turned to award-winning veteran Ed Cash (Chris Tomlin, David Crowder Band) and their friend Steve Wilson (Fish, Hawk Nelson) who had co-written three songs on Leeland’s debut, including the title cut “Sound of Melodies.” Cash, who produced the bulk of the new tracks and co-wrote several with Leeland and Jack, was very impressed with Leeland’s recording process. “It was so apparent from day one that God was the star and the focus,” he says. “Unlike any record I’ve ever made, we started most every day with about an hour of unplanned prayer and worship, just getting caught up into the presence of God. And I’m certain that is reflected in the music. I knew that Leeland was extremely talented, but now I understand why they have such a powerful dedication to the service of God – they are sold out for Jesus – He is first far and above all else in their lives.”

Wilson, meanwhile, witnessed the creative spontaneity spurred by the band’s faith when the producer hosted them for a songwriting session. On the way to that meeting, Leeland and Jack had pulled over to help a homeless man when they noticed him asking for money. Jack recalls how that encounter redirected the songwriting session. “We’d been working on a faster [tempo] idea, when all of a sudden, Leeland went up to the piano and just started playing a slow beautiful melody. We started thinking about that homeless man and began writing. Over the next 30 minutes, God just really gave us our title song, “Love Is On the Move.”

As they wrote, the band saw its entire mission statement poetically unfold before their eyes. A poignant response to both physical and spiritual poverty, “Love Is On The Move” best represents the album’s overall theme. Jack explains, “We see our calling as a band as two-fold: reaching out to the poor and reaching the ‘up-and-outers.’ America’s a rich nation, but we’re spiritually poor. We want to see God bring a personal revival in the hearts of Americans and transform our nation.”

Leeland explains that revival is so much more than feeling goose bumps. It changes your character, mind set and the way you act toward others. “You start caring way more about the poor than you do yourself,” he says. “You start caring way more about hurting people. You become more courageous and bold for Jesus. Dreams that you thought were dead start rising up in your heart. You begin to believe again that you can do these things for the Kingdom of God. And not only do you start believing, you act on those dreams. That’s revival. That’s love on the move.”

Remarkable vision calls for a remarkable album, and that’s what you get with *Love Is On The Move*. Leeland takes you to that rare place where innocence and fervor meet depth of soul. And like the bands that inform Leeland’s work – Coldplay, Travis, Tree63, U2 and Delirious among them – the Texans’ brand of Britpop is both emotive and layered. Consider the album’s opening track, “The Door.” With soaring guitars on one end and textured counterparts on the other, the rockalong is a joyful and determined celebration of The Way, The Truth and The Life. Later, Leeland’s empathetic vocals, a climactic rhythm section, and majestic strings seize the day as “Via Dolorosa” contemplates the road of suffering that Jesus walked to the cross. For the prophetic “Pure Bride,” the versatile grace of Leeland’s voice is on ethereal display over alluring synth treatments and flitting percussion, while piano and vocals lead the way on the prayerful ballad “Holy Spirit Have Your Way.”

Leeland takes its new music and action call on tour this fall as it reunites with Brandon Heath (and welcomes special guest Francesca Battistelli) to co-headline the “Follow You Tour.” The artists will give audiences the chance to respond to each night’s worship with immediate action as they strongly recommend child sponsorships through Food for the Hungry.

When Leeland’s not on the road, band members continue to lead worship at the Baytown, Texas church the Mooring’s parents began pastoring six years ago. The band also serves regularly in their community’s Gulf Coast emergency preparedness programs and at a local food pantry which feeds hundreds of people each week. Earlier this year, Leeland and Jack were also the only musicians invited to the White House for its “Compassion in Action Roundtable” which targeted emerging leaders in developing the next generation of America’s social entrepreneurs and nonprofit leaders. The way the band sees it, love should be on the move locally and globally. After all, doesn’t God choose to expand his Kingdom and His love by reaching out to the world through the lives and actions of His followers? Perhaps Leeland sums it up best, “Jesus was the first to be love on the move when He went to the cross. But when He did that, he transferred that love to us so we become His love on the move.”

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