

# 1000 GENERATIONS

## TURN OFF THE LESSER LIGHTS

At first glance, one might think the surprising emergence of Varietal Records artists **1000 Generations** is merely another case of "worship leaders make good and sign major label deal." True, fresh out of college, **Steven** and **Amanda Potaczek** (pronounced "Pō-ta-zik") turned the spare bedroom of their home into a makeshift recording studio, made their own custom CD, and watched in amazement as it was named *Worship Leader* magazine's "best worship album of the year." That, in turn, sparked a growing national following, further accolades and awards and, yes, eventually a major record deal with a free-thinking label who doesn't believe in formulas where calling and natural talent are concerned. And that's just the kind of label these artists needed. Sure the band performs addictive piano-driven pop, but why would you dare position honest worship born of brokenness as anything typical?

Though some have been tempted to trivialize **1000 Generations** with the title "Next Big Thing," the band's emergence has had nothing to do with heavy-handed retail, radio or press positioning. Nor will the band's longevity be determined by trends in those markets. Simply put, **1000 Generations** has and will continue to make music, not for an industry, but for the church at large. And while they don't set out to break the rules, they do ignore much of the prevailing "wisdom" and could not care less about posturing. Consider the way **Steven Potaczek** is completely at ease telling you **1000 Generation's** music sounds like other specific artists. "I always tell people that we sound like **Coldplay** got in a head-on collision with **Billy Joel**, and they met Jesus," he says.

This unassuming nature has been a primary trait throughout the band's history, perhaps even *despite* the band's history. After Steven and his wife Amada unveiled their eclectic piano pop debut, *Prayers*, in 2003, they expanded **1000 Generations** into a four-piece band and soon landed national tour dates with **Jars of Clay** and **Sarah Kelly**. By the time their second self-produced/self-released album, *To Those Who Cry* (2006), made the rounds, the seasoned writers at *Christianity Today* and hard-to-impress music critics at *Relevant* and *Renown* magazines had joined the praise fest. Hailed for their "superior artistic nature" and the freedom they show to musically "color outside the lines," **1000 Generations** also found themselves championed for writing honest, unguarded lyrics — lyrics of a sort most worship acts don't attempt. The Gospel Music Association Academy responded the following year by awarding the band the coveted "Song of the Year" in Estes Park, Colorado.

**1000 Generations**--which takes its name from the five passages of scripture affirming God's "covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands"—discovered their unusual relational approach quickly defined the band's live performances as well. "We really believe that when spiritual leaders are weak, transparent and vulnerable in front of others that it does nothing but good," explains **Steven**.

You can bet major record labels took notice, and before long **1000 Generations** inked a deal with Vineyard Music's Varietal Records imprint (home to **Jeremy Riddle** and **Chris Lizotte**). As the band looks ahead to their first nationally-distributed album, *Turn Off The Lesser Lights*, which hits streets August 4, it's helpful to look back to better understand how the album's distinct sound and thoughtful, intimate lyrics were born.

Singer/multi-instrumentalist **Steven Potaczek** first began piano when he was eight — the age his dad taught him to play **Ritchie Valens'** "La Bamba" and multiple **Beatles** songs on a Casio keyboard. Though his artistic gifting was nurtured, his home life was extremely complicated and often difficult. His family was actually monitored by the Department of Children and Family Services for a period, and then his parents divorced while he was in high school. And though he had been raised in a Catholic home, attended a Catholic school and then mass each Sunday, it

wasn't until college—where he started suffering from an anxiety disorder—that **Steven** eventually committed his life to Christ.

While his problems didn't magically disappear, **Steven** has since seen God restore his family relationships and help him with his anxiety. "Most importantly, I am growing with God and others in ways that I never knew were possible," he says.

Not long after his relationship with Jesus began, **Steven** and **Amanda** crossed paths while attending Anderson University in Indiana. In a foreshadowing encounter, it was in their very first conversation that they discussed which songs should be performed during worship at a campus ministry gathering.

**Amanda**, who started playing guitar when she was in high school, had been raised in a Christian home and, as a college student, began turning to worship in response to life's hardship. "In every tough season I've gone through," she says, "worship has been a profound encouragement to me."

By the time they were 22 years old, **Amanda** and **Steven** were married, members of the worship team at Vineyard Community Church in Indianapolis, and had recorded their debut CD. Given the surprising response to the album, **Steven** and **Amanda** realized **1000 Generations** needed to expand into a full band so they could tour. They soon enlisted their worship team's bassist **Alain Picard** and drummer **Lorin Lemme**. **Picard**, who is a native of France, began playing bass at 16 and moved to the United States six years later as part of a ministry band. After meeting **Lemme**, who started drumming in the 5th grade, **Picard** introduced his talented friend to **Steven** and **Amanda**. Now full members of **1000 Generations**, **Picard** and **Lemme** handle bass and drums on the albums as well.

Today, the **Potaczeks**, who reside in Fishers, Indiana, continue to serve as worship pastors at their Indianapolis church. "We're also really committed to raising other people up as musicians and worship leaders," explains **Steven**. "**Amanda's** a guitar instructor and teaches songwriting at Anderson University. And my main role at the church is to raise up other worship leaders—that's why we can leave and do what we do on the road."

While their first two albums were defined by world-music-influenced piano pop, **1000 Generations** sought to reflect the immediacy of their concert performances with the new **Turn Off The Lesser Lights**. The result is a pop-rock album that leans heavily on both electric guitar and piano and features song arrangements which translate naturally to the live setting. Once again self-produced, their Varietal Records debut showcases **Steven** on lead vocals and multiple instruments and **Amanda** on electric and acoustic guitars and both support and lead vocals.

A year prior to release, forthcoming songs from **Turn Off The Lesser Lights** had already drawn major accolades with the social justice anthem "**How Big Small Can Be**" named the GMA Academy's "Song of the Year" and the hook-driven rock gem "**Fascinated**" cracking the Top 3 of The John Lennon Songwriting Contest. While it doesn't take a competition judge to admire **1000 Generations'** musical creativity, a discerning listener will appreciate the band's thoughtful, cliché-free songwriting. "We are passionate about lyrical excellence," says **Amanda**. "As Christians we have the Creator of everything as the source of our inspiration, and there has to be new ways to express concepts that are unchangeable—like the nature of God."

**Turn Off The Lesser Lights** reveals a classic approach to songwriting reminiscent of **The Beatles**, **Billy Joel** and **Elton John**. A prime example is the album's hopeful lead single, "**Fail Us Not**," which features **Steven** and **Amanda** sharing lead vocals and a strong melodic acoustic guitar/piano-based track. "I had started to think about all the things I'm afraid will happen or that have happened," says **Amanda** of the song's lyrical theme. "And I was just really moved by the fact that those things don't put a damper on God's power or keep Him from working in our lives, and to really just accept the knowledge that we have Christ's Spirit in us. Because of that we aren't subject to the defeat that all those things—the worry, loss and doubt—can bring."

The lyrical themes on ***Turn Off The Lesser Lights*** are every bit as layered and diverse as the band's musical influences. One profound objective ties all the songs together, however. Above all, **1000 Generations** is intent upon seeing people connect with God—whether followers of Christ who've believed for decades, or pilgrims experiencing worship for the first time. "We're really passionate about people having an experience they can walk away with," concludes **Steven**. "We believe that if someone has a real experience with God, that it will change their lives, and their kids' lives, and on down the line. Even as we write songs, we're thinking about that in the long term."

And so go their aspirations to live out what Jesus modeled. This band that loves, ministers, accepts, challenges, teaches, persuades, serves and mentors others who, in turn, go and do likewise. Yes, this is how the work of the Kingdom gets done. And we're all the better for it.

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