



Mister Bill

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MISTER BILL MUSIC

By Rob Rollins

Summer is here and for many families that means spending time traveling on the road. The big dilemma: finding a CD to put in the car stereo that will entertain the kids — or will at least postpone “Are we there yet?” for just a little while. Your kids are too old for Barney and while they like some of the Christian artists you prefer, it’s your music not theirs. What you need is an alternative-and the new self-titled release from **Mister Bill** could be just the ticket.

Mister Bill (not to be confused with Mr. Bill of Saturday Night Live fame) is an energetic father of five who is a talented musician and songwriter. This is his second installment of original children’s alternative music following his 1997 release of *When I Grow Up*. You may be familiar with his song “Wa-Wa-Water” from that release which continues to receive regular airplay on some Christian children’s radio stations.

What exactly is children’s alternative music? It is as fluid as the imagination of kids and almost as hard to define. It encompasses a myriad of styles—from pop and jazz, to rap, hip-hop, and rock. But really, it is music aimed at pre-teens. This niche (kids roughly from 10-12 years old) is underserved in the Christian music industry as most of the kids’ music is targeted for the very young or for teenagers. Mister Bill’s ministry is targeted right in the middle by providing contemporary and non-traditional musical styles combined with strong faith-based lyrics.

All of the cuts on the disc are based on Scripture and aim to inspire and entertain you and your kids. “God is Talking to You,” is an encouragement to listen to God, *Members of the Same Body* describes how everyone has their part in God’s kingdom, and “Take it to the Top” tells kids that no matter what they’re going through, they can always pray and receive comfort from God. I particularly enjoyed the lyrics on “Every Day” based on Psalm 145:

*Every day, I want to praise you
Every day, I want you near,
Every day, walking in the Spirit
Every day, your voice so clear.*

What parent wouldn’t want their kids singing those lyrics— especially when compared to some of the more secular options? The music is clearly fun and entertaining. And because multiple musical styles are integrated throughout— sometimes even in the same song- it is also very different and unpredictable. Surprisingly this mix provides for a pleasurable listening experience. Most of the selections have broad appeal, with a favorite of many sure to be the driving rock energy and repeatable lyrics of “Every Day.” Also enjoyable is “Little Man,” a story about Zacchaeus told with a Caribbean flair, and “In The Jungle”, which utilizes extensive percussion and animal sounds to transport you deep into the wild.

The disc also includes a remake of the Audio Adrenaline hit “Big House,” a fun adaptation of “Pharoah Pharoah,” and Mister Bill’s rock version of “This Little Light of Mine” (warning: this is not how you remembered it in Sunday school).

One element that makes Mister Bill’s music stand out is that his high energy and enthusiasm are clearly evident. Listening to the music, you can picture him having a blast while singing his heart out for the kids. Several of the cuts (“Every Day” and “Big House,” in particular) feel like “live” versions of the song as he yells encouragement to the audience.

Having stated his desire to reach pre-teens, along with younger kids (my emphasis), Mister Bill includes several cuts that skew towards the younger set. There’s nothing wrong with that but pre-teens will have a harder time connecting with the soft ballad “I Ride My Bike” (reminiscent of Joe Scruggs) or be drawn to selections that use children as backup singers (“Members of the Same Body,” “Pharoah Pharoah”).

Overall, though, Mister Bill provides plenty of variety on this release that most members of the family will find something to enjoy.

Pros: Good driving energy with fun, inspiring lyrics. Mister Bill displays his heart through his music and that is a definite plus. Favorite selections: “Little Man,” “Every Day,” “Big House,” “In the Jungle.”

Cons: While they are few, a couple of the tracks use lyrics (e.g. the use of the word “tummies”) or tempos that will have limited appeal to pre-teens.

The Verdict: This is a worthwhile addition to your collection. Mister Bill is breaking new ground and he’s doing so in a way that kids-and parents-will appreciate. As an independent artist, you won’t likely find him at your Christian bookstore but his music is available through some major on-line retailers or through his Web site.

My Score: 4 stars.

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Track Listing

- God is Talking to You
- Members of the Same Body
- This Little Light of Mine
- Little Man
- Pharoah Pharoah
- Every Day
- Big House
- Take it to the Top
- In the Jungle
- I Ride My Bike