

= The Worship Project =

The Worship Project is the fifth independent album by American Christian rock band MercyMe . Produced by the band and recorded by Jim Bryson (the band 's keyboardist) , the album was released on October 14 , 1999 . In contrast to the band 's previous efforts , which were influenced by grunge music , The Worship Project is a worship album . MercyMe wrote songs for the album using a basic verse ? chorus style so as to be easy to learn and sing along to and to easily fit on a PowerPoint screen . The album incorporates alternative , rock , and pop musical styles , as well as " rootsy " elements like organs and violins .

Like most independent albums , The Worship Project did not appear on any record charts after its release and received little attention from music critics , with the exception of a review in the UK Christian music magazine Cross Rhythms . However , the album was much more successful than the band 's previous efforts , selling over 60 @, @ 000 copies within a year . The band would release one more independent album before signing with INO Records and releasing their first major studio album , Almost There (2001) . Several songs from The Worship Project were included on the album , including " I Can Only Imagine " , which became the band 's breakthrough single and the first Christian song to receive a double platinum certification from the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) .

= = Background and composition = =

MercyMe formed in 1994 by vocalist Bart Millard , guitarist Mike Scheuchzer , and keyboardist Jim Bryson . The band later brought on drummer Robby Shaffer and bassist Nathan Cochran . Prior to the release of The Worship Project , MercyMe had independently released four Christian alternative rock albums , drawing influence from the grunge style popular at the time . While playing live , however , the band realized that their original songs from these albums failed to connect with their audiences . In contrast , their covers of popular worship songs received a greater reception among live audience , leading the band to write and produce a whole album of original worship songs .

The Worship Project was MercyMe 's first attempt at producing corporate worship songs . With the exception of " Beautiful " , which was written solely by Cochran , the lyrics on the album were written by Millard , while the music was composed by the entire band . The band utilized a simple verse ? chorus format when writing songs the album , with the songs being designed to easily fit on a PowerPoint screen . The only song on the album not to utilize this format , " I Can Only Imagine " , was included at the last minute , and only because it was important to Millard , who wrote the song reminiscing about his dad 's death . The album was recorded at The Pig Sty in Fort Worth , Texas . It was produced by the band , engineered and mixed by Bryson , and mastered by Eric Wolf at Wolf Mastering in Nashville .

The Worship Project has been described as being a worship album , drawing influences from rock , pop , and alternative music . Mike Rimmer of Cross Rhythms noted the album occasionally features " rootsy " elements as well as " Hammond ? style organs " and " faint violins " . The album 's opening song , " Here With Us " , had been described as a rock song . In the Encyclopedia of Contemporary Christian Music , Mark Allan Powell considered " Happy Little Love Song " as being a " Pearl Jam ? type anthem fit for arenas " . Powell also described " Hearts Sing Louder " as being influenced by Smash Mouth , and felt " It 's My Joy " had a " bluesy rhythm " with " 70s organs " ; the song also samples " Joyful , Joyful We Adore You " .

= = Release , reception , and impact = =

The Worship Project was released on October 14 , 1999 . The band also issued The Worship Project Kit , which included the album as well a devotional and the words and chords to the songs . The album was sold through the Internet as well as bookstore signings . Copies of the album were produced by the band in their garage . Like most independent albums , The Worship Project did not appear on any record charts and met with limited fanfare . In the October 1 , 2000 edition of Cross

Rhythms , Mike Rimmer gave the album seven out of ten stars . Rimmer praised the album as being far superior to most major ? label worship albums , but felt that " it all sounds curiously familiar without being distinctive ... whilst this is a good effort , it falls short of being amazing " . Sales for The Worship Project far exceeded sales of the band 's previous independent records ? according to Millard , whereas their previous albums would be lucky to sell 1 @, @ 000 copies in a year , The Worship Project sold over 60 @, @ 000 copies within a year . Millard estimated the album 's overall sales at 100 @, @ 000 ? other sources peg the album 's sales as of 2006 at 60 @, @ 000 or 65 @, @ 000 copies .

The difficulty of selling the album directly , in addition to having to book and manage for themselves , led the band to pursue a contract with a record label . The band would release one more independent album , 2000 's Look , before signing with INO Records and releasing their 2001 album Almost There . Two songs from The Worship Project were re ? recorded and included on Almost There ? " I Can Only Imagine " and " Cannot Say Enough " . " I Can Only Imagine " was released as the album 's second single and became the band 's breakthrough hit , topping the US Christian radio charts and receiving a GMA Dove Award for " Song of the Year " before becoming a hit on US mainstream radio as well . It became the first Christian song to be certified double platinum by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) , signifying sales of over 2 million digital copies of the song . Another song from The Worship Project , " Hearts Sing Louder " , was included on the band 's 2011 Family Christian Stores ? exclusive album The Worship Sessions .

= = Personnel = =

(Credits from the album liner notes)

= = Track listing = =

(Credits and tracklist from the album liner notes)