

New Oddwalk Ministries CD emphasizes going forth, sustained by Christ

By Jay Nies

The picture on the cover of Oddwalk Ministries' latest CD, "Let Us Go, Rejoicing," places the beholder at the threshold between the holy place that is church and the holy place that is a world waiting to be evangelized.

That's exactly where Shannon Cerneka and Orin Johnson of Oddwalk Ministries want the people who hear their music and testimony to be aware that they're standing.

"Our focus at Oddwalk is to talk about what happens when you leave church, after you've been nourished by the Real Presence of Jesus Christ, in the Community of Faith," said Shannon, half of the Oddwalk Ministries duo, and youth ministry coordinator for St. Peter parish in Jefferson City. "Knowing that you've received Jesus, are you changed? And if you ARE changed, you need to go out and be Christian and show people the love of Christ."

The reverse view of that threshold is equally relevant, Shannon emphasized.

"I don't think it's an accident that Christ presents Himself to us as food that we receive," he said. "It strengthens us as we go out, but we need to keep coming back to Him, to be strengthened, to be sustained."

That's the message of "Let Us Go, Rejoicing," an eclectic mix of upbeat songs for liturgy, praise and fellowship aimed specifically at teens and young adults who are making life decisions about who they are about to become, and how God fits into that.

The music and performances are highly collaborative, drawing abundantly from the gifts and innovations of both artists.

"We put a lot of time and energy into this CD," said Shannon. "We feel it's a really good representation of who we are and what we do. We feel really good about it."

In addition to their day jobs, Shannon and Orin — who is music and liturgy director for the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville, Ill. — travel the country, performing at youth gatherings and conventions. This new CD, mostly recorded live, gives a strong sense of the work they do.

When Oddwalk Ministries was created in Spring 2004, Shannon and Orin came up with the name by reflecting on the biblical story of the

walk to Emmaus.

It was such a strange journey in Luke 24:13-35, when Cleopas and his companion walked alongside the newly Risen Christ, discussing Scripture, and were not aware of His identity until they sat down to eat at their destination.

"Being Christian, the things God asks you to do can be a bit bizarre," said Shannon, "Don't question what God wants you to do — just do it."

Regarding message they hope to impart to the youth and adults they minister to, they return to their motto, "Community, participation, mission."

"We want (our audience) to feel changed — either through the Eucharist or from our music," said Orin. "We want them to be transformed; to have a willingness to enter into the Church's mission and help build the Church."

"Let Us Go Rejoicing"

Most of the music on the CD is very energetic, with Shannon playing guitar, Mr. Johnson playing keyboards, and both of them singing with some powerful backup

from Nanette Munie Norrenberns, a founding member of Firewalk, a Christian rock band.

The first five tracks (three songs and two stories), complete with raucous audience participation, were recorded in March 2006 at a youth conference in Collinsville, Ill., where Oddwalk Ministries was among the keynote presenters.

The next five tracks were recorded in a Jefferson City studio by Mike Kivett, and are meant for liturgical use and personal reflection.

The following five were recorded live at the Diocesan Junior High Youth Rally in April 2006 at Helias Interparish High School.

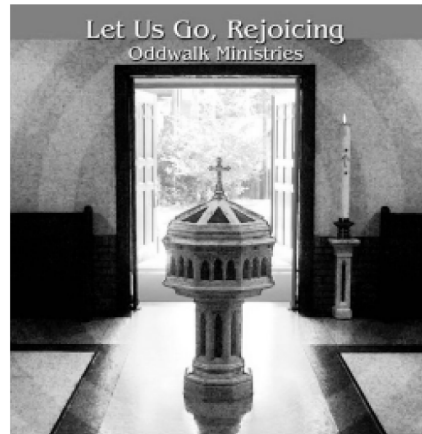
The last track, called "Winds of Change," has Shannon and Orin back in the studio, performing a piece that's rather out of character.

"Winds of Change" is definitely not your usual liturgical fare," Shannon stated. "Our wives just hate it. We decided we weren't going to

play it anymore. But I like it."

More-positive personal connections abound on the CD.

Orin wrote "Let Us Go



Rejoicing" as the responsorial psalm for his wedding in 2004.

"He's used 'Let Us Go Rejoicing' at the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville, Ill., a few times," Shannon said. "The choir really loves it."

Shannon wrote "Bless the Lord My Soul" as the psalm for his wife's sister's wedding in Fall 2005. Shannon and

Orin have used it a couple of other places, including an all-school Mass with Bishop Gaydos at Helias.

"A lot of the tracks on the live parts of the CD are audience-based," said Shannon. "Our goal is to write and perform stuff that is accessible to whoever we're playing to. Rarely will you see us stand up and sing them a song. Every once in a while, we'll do one as a prayerful reflection. But 90 percent of what we do is to draw everyone together into prayer or some sort of joint active response."

The CD's opener is a forceful, rhythmic rendition of "Lord I Life Your Name On High," a popular standard for Life Teen and other youth-oriented gatherings. But it's usually played softly.

"I play songs the way I hear them in my head," Shannon explained. "That song has a lot of energy in it, so we draw on that when we play it."

He wrote "Let the Children Come to Me" seven

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years ago, but Oddwalk only recently added the audience responses that make it so much fun for crowds to share. At one point in the recording, Orin is showing the audience the actions to accompany the song, and falls down, eliciting laughter and applause.

"Jammin' with Jesus" is from Shannon's first solo CD.

"One day, Orin bought a 'keytar,' to attach to his computer to compose at home," said Shannon. "We thought if any two people could incorporate such a corny instrument, it's us. So we played with ways to use it. Now we've created a moment where we play 'Jammin' with Jesus,' and he goes into the keytar solo. He's on his knees, bending back, putting the keytar behind his back. The kids really like it. It's a lot of fun, so we incorporate that into a lot of what we do."

"Anima Christi," another Orin original, was written for his wife as a gift. This prayer, often prayed at Communion, is one of her favorites.

Keeping the fire burning

Many of the young people who have bought the CD so far have done so right after Oddwalk Ministries' performances. The music helps them remember the spiritual encounter they've had with Jesus in the course of the youth event, said Shannon.

"We're not so much performance-based insomuch as the 'you and me and God'

relationship," he said. "It's more like 'WE and God.' Our music is very community-based, very liturgy-based."

The CDs, he said, are less a way to make money than to promote the work of Oddwalk Ministries.

"There are a lot of really good things happening out there in youth ministry," said Shannon, "and when we travel, we get to see other people doing what we do. I'm involved in youth ministry right here. But we're also using our gifts to encourage the ministry to go on, and we want people to keep doing youth ministry and having other people carry it out."

All of that brings him back to the church doors on the CD cover. They happen to be from the church he grew up attending in Belleville, Ill. The baptismal font inside the door symbolizes the cleansing waters through which people come into the Church and into the Church's mission of evangelization.

"The reason we're here in the first place is the saving waters of baptism, because of the saving life of Jesus," said Shannon.

Audio clips, lyrics and other information about "Let Us Go, Rejoicing" and other Oddwalk Ministries CDs and activities are available online at:

www.oddwalkministries.com

Contributing to this article was Susan M. Knapp, a staff writer for *The Messenger*, newspaper of the Diocese of Belleville, Ill.