

# The Red Book Sessions

BLOOD & FIRE



The Singing Company leads worship at a united meeting in June.

**E**ric Himes wants to share his “Salvo” passion with everyone. Just ask him about it—but be ready to give him ample time. One of the things he’ll tell you about is his love for the doctrinally solid and spiritually challenging lyrics found in the official song book of The Salvation Army. Eric and best friend Jonathan Bukiewicz began years ago putting a new sound to some of those old songs. The result is a new band called The Singing Company, and a CD titled “The Red Book Sessions.” The band led praise and worship at the Central territory’s Congress in June, and hundreds of copies of the CD were given out at a release party that Friday evening.

In this interview with YS editor Major Curtiss A. Hartley, Eric shares some of his heart and passion behind the recording of “The Red Book Sessions.”

*Eric, first introduce yourself.*

I’m 24 years old and I am married to Cathleen and we have a cat named Salinger. I have a Bachelor’s Degree in English (Creative Writing) from DePaul University (graduated in 2004). I’m currently the Director of Youth Evangelism and Discipleship for the Metropolitan division (Chicago area) of the Central territory. It’s basically my dream job; I get to lead worship during monthly youth meetings called “Prayer & Praise Nights” and speak to kids about the Lord, the Bible and The Salvation Army. I also get to lead a summer youth mission school

known as Band of Survivors and I write for and run a SA youth website called MetroYouthNetwork.com.

*What’s different about “The Red Book Sessions”?*

Nothing, really. It’s just a continuation of Salvation Army worship warfare. The idea to put new tunes to old Army lyrics is just a reversal in concept of early Army worship when they put new lyrics to old and popular tunes. The only things that



Eric and Cathleen share a moment of encouragement after the CD release party.

are different are some of the original songs on the album. I guess you could also say that the style of worship is different compared to the original/traditional style in terms of arrangements.

***Tell me where the idea came from.***

The idea to “contemporize” Salvation Army songs came—embarrassingly enough—from a Christian swing band I was in when I was 14 called Johnny 5 Alive. Jon Bukiewicz, who was also in that horrible swing band, was one of the main forces behind “The Red Book Sessions.” It’s cool that God was planting the idea in our hearts even back then. The idea was put on hold when the band died (after only a few practices) but it resurfaced more than a year ago when I visited The War College in Vancouver and heard students sing “Storm the Forts of Darkness” from memory in an early morning prayer meeting. I couldn’t get the melody out of my mind and when I went home I started to crack open the song book to the “Salvation Soldier” portion and was hooked by the passion and boldness of early SA worship. Soon, I had a

few new melodies to these old lyrics and some arrangements of existing melodies as well as some completely original songs that made it on the album. Jon and I worked on recording demos of these songs and then we shopped the idea to the THQ Youth Department. They were incredible in getting the project approved and funded.

***Where did your passion for the old-time SA song book come from?***

It began when I was in the swing band and I went through the song book reading the songs and circling ones I liked. I’ve always liked old hymns and have been touched and impressed by their thoughtful and powerful lyrics. Plus, being raised in a musical Salvationist family didn’t hurt either.

***Do you have a favorite CD?***

My favorite worship CD is Matt Redman’s “Facedown” album. I love it because it’s focused, simple and powerful. It’s also really practical in that all the songs can be easily learned and used in congregational worship. I also love Hillsong United. My all-time favorite album is “Left &

Leaving” by The Weakerthans. The lyrics are interesting, thought-provoking and moving. Our version of “All Your Anxiety” is recorded in the style of The Weakerthans.

***How has this whole project changed you?***

It’s been a blessing to me every step of the way. I’m humbled that the songs that were born in my bedroom during times of prayer and worship now have new purpose in impacting other believers. It’s a powerful privilege to think that some soldier’s song from a hundred years ago is my song today and some other soldier’s song tomorrow. It is a unique and beautiful heritage!

***What do you want listeners to get out of playing this CD?***

I believe that next generation Salvationists are in danger of losing “the fight” that is indicative of classic Army worship. I hope that “The Red Book Sessions” will combat this possibility by preserving, translating and using many of these old Army fight songs for praise and worship use today. I hope that reclaiming this fight in worship will hold a con-



*“The Singing Company” is Eric (on previous page, pictured with wife Cathleen) on lead vocals, harmonica and rhythm guitar; Jonathan (left) on bass guitar; Keri Shay (above left) on vocals; Nate Irvin (above right) on drums and percussion; Nate Hood on electric guitar and mandolin; and Phil Laeger (not pictured) on Piano, organ, accordion and vocals.*

gregation captive, excite an interest in worship warfare and lead worshippers to action! I hope that these songs will fortify listeners and give them boldness to “pull down the devil’s kingdom” and “win the world for Jesus!” So it’s not about singing songs that talk about action but hopefully being influenced into action by these songs.

**How does this recording, these songs, impact your vision for young Salvos?**

Let me start by saying this: the enemy wants me to think that I am just an Army of one—that the ideas the Lord gives me are weird. The enemy wants to make me feel like the only lone freak who wants to “win the world for Jesus.” This project proves that I am not alone but a part of a



*Eric leads The Singing Company as they teach one of their songs to the guests during the party.*



*Bernie and Keri Shay chat after the party.*

large Army that wants to do some real damage against the kingdom of hell and start to fight offensively (rather than only think defensively). These songs, these Army fight songs, are aggressive. They are offensive, literally offensive to the enemy, they call him out and say that he has no power over me. For instance in General Osborn’s song “No More! No More!” it says in the third verse:

*When the accuser comes to the judgement,*

*Seeking my soul to claim,  
I have a token in the blood.*

*I have the word of a pardoning God.*

What’s so cool about this song is not only does it seek to give God all the glory that is due, but it also lets the enemy know that he is a defeated foe, that he has no power over me and that I am free from sin. It’s awesome to claim this gift and do so in worship. Getting back to “the Army of one thought,” what I’ve seen in worshipping through

these songs is that I am not alone and that others want to use this type of worship not just to fortify themselves (read: defensive) but offend the enemy (read: offensive).

**What’s your favorite memory of the recording process?**

My favorite memory was recording “That You Love Me” with the Madison Gospel Choir from the Chicago Temple corps and listening to playback with all of the musicians in the room. I was very moved that all these important people came together to make that song work.

**The CD is interactive. What are your hopes/plans for that?**

The CD contains PDF files of all the sheet music on the album. One of the main goals of the album was to put a practical resource in the hands of the listeners so that they can use these songs in worship at their corps. We also plan to release other resources on our Web site <http://thesingingcompany.com>.



*Producer Bernie Dake is presented with a framed copy of the CD at the release party.*

**Why should other young Salvationists care about the old red song book?**

Because it may be one of the keys to ending the “worship wars” that have plagued the Church, not just the Army, over the last thirty years. It is our common language, a link between the old and the new and hopefully what will be new in years to come. It has some incredibly rich insight, focus, theology and power.

**When you’re at home and your wife catches you humming, what’s it most likely to be?**

I don’t hum, I sing. I’ve been obsessed with the hymn “Morning Has Broken.” I love the melody and the subtle and powerful imagery. My wife is the one who hums and I usually catch her humming one of two songs: “That You Love Me” or “You Alone” by David Crowder.