

## MICHAEL BOLTON

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#### Making him whole: After pulling his life together, Carpinteria musician releases new faith-based CD

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On Martin Topham's debut album, "Make Me Whole," there is a song called "Giving Back." The biographical tale comes with a considerable degree of authority as few know the value of giving back better than the Carpinteria singer-songwriter.

A 2008 graduate of the Salvation Army's Adult Rehabilitation Center program in Carpinteria, Mr. Topham wrote the song to document an emotive personal journey. It was a voyage that took the Christian musician from living on the streets to reigniting his passion for music and being part of three local musical crusades to releasing his new faith-based CD.

Not only does Mr. Topham, a self-employed handyman, perform as a solo singer-songwriter at various venues in Carpinteria, including the farmers market, where he complements his own compositions with songs by the likes of Bob Dylan, he's also in a local three-piece called Jesus Trio and is a member of First Baptist Church of Carpinteria's Praise Team, which plays during Sunday service.

Music has been an integral part of Mr. Topham's life ever since his father introduced him to a handful of contemporary classics and sent him to guitar lessons.

"My interest in music started around 7 years of age," Mr. Topham explained prior to performing with the Praise Team at the First Baptist Church of Carpinteria's worship service last Sunday. "Back then, I just wanted to play guitar and that was it."

"A kid across the street gave me my first guitar and I was hooked. I went for lessons and played in a band all through high school. My father turned me on to a lot of music like Pink Floyd and The Who, but I have to say that I discovered Bob Dylan all on my own."

Music had to take a backseat in Mr. Topham's life for a while. Born in Long Branch, N.J., Mr. Topham moved to Los Angeles with his parents while in high school. His father was an audio technician in the film industry and relocated to California to be closer to Hollywood. After initially working in cinematic sound with his father, in the early 1990s Mr. Topham relocated to Carpinteria as a single parent because he wanted a peaceful community in which to raise his son. But in 1997, after having waged a constant battle with alcoholism, the disease got the upper hand, as he was arrested for a felony DUI, which sent Mr. Topham's life plummeting into a downward spiral. He was subsequently sentenced to prison.

It was while serving time there that Mr. Topham was re-introduced to the guitar and music started to again exert an undeniable presence in his life. It not only supplemented his salvation but, since his release in 2001, has provided a source of expressive and creative focus.

"I wrote 'Make Me Whole' while I was in prison," Mr. Topham explained. "And I played it in different prisons to a lot of inmates. A couple of years after I got out, I went to the (Salvation Army's) ARC and they allowed me to be on their Praise Team, and there I ended up playing that song every Sunday."

"I wrote that song at a time in my life when I needed a lot of help and I was crying out for Jesus, so it means something to people that want to change their life. And, after playing it at the ARC, the people there said I should record it."

The song is now the title track to Mr. Topham's album and serves as a stirring testament to the help that was forthcoming when he was most in need. After successfully completing the drug and alcohol addiction program at ARC, Mr. Topham became a regular at First Baptist Church of Carpinteria's Celebrate Recovery program. Subsequently, he not only joined the church, he has for the past two years been a part of its Praise Team.

The opportunity to play traditional songs of praise in addition to his own is something he is relishing.

"It's a lot more work," Mr. Topham laughed when asked about the difference between writing his own compositions and performing traditional Christian music. "Here at this church, we do a lot of hymns from the hymnal. So, right now, I'm studying out of the hymn book. But I have also introduced a lot of songs, including my own, to the Praise Team."

For the past year, Mr. Topham has been part of another church-based collective called the Jesus Trio. Incorporating three vocalists along with Mr. Topham's guitar work, the trio plays at First Baptist Church of Carpinteria the fourth Sunday of the month.

When not performing for an audience, Mr. Topham can be found at home -- he now has his own place -- working on his latest offering of songs. In addition to guitar, he plays piano and keyboards. He records his compositions at his home studio, where he, in part, worked on his new CD.

Mr. Topham finds his greatest inspiration comes from the opportunity to help others in the way he has been helped.

"Recovery and music and the Lord have a lot to do with where I am right now," Mr. Topham admitted. "I want to try and reach out to people that have the same affliction that I had. I want them to know that there is help out there and that you can come out of it no matter how bad it gets."

The motivation for recording the CD was to reach out to others who might be on the same destructive path he was. He believes that the avowal of the songs themselves along with his own personal story will not only offer a voice of encouragement but a case in point.

The initial release of "Make Me Whole," which can be purchased for \$12.97 or downloaded through the independent online music retailer CD Baby ([www.cdbaby.com](http://www.cdbaby.com)), was intentionally kept small. Mr. Topham plans to shop it around to try to get it recorded in a more professional studio setting and draw together a cast of supporting musicians.

While many of the 13 songs on "Make Me Whole" have been a work in progress for several years, Mr. Topham has recently completed a new celebratory song that hits just as close to home as his more cathartic songs of spiritual affirmation. Titled "Carpinteria," the song was written by Mr. Topham and his wife, Iris, whom he married in 2002, and is an impassioned ode to their adopted hometown.

There is even a local push to make the composition the official town song.

"It's a happy song," Mr. Topham said with a smile. "This community has given me so much that I wanted to give something back to it."



Local singer-songwriter Martin Topham rehearses prior to Sunday service at First Baptist Church of Carpinteria. Mr. Topham has recently released a faith-based album titled "Make Me Whole."  
BRETT LEIGH DICKS PHOTOS



In addition to his church-related performances, Mr. Topham often plays at the Carpinteria farmers market, where he supplements his own compositions with songs by the likes of Bob Dylan.

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