

## Interview with Marc James of Verra Cruz

***Hi Marc, what are you up to at the moment?***

At the moment we are in the middle of recording our second verra cruz album as well as releasing a live ep and I'm working on a new solo record. so very busy!!

***You've been on the scene for over a decade now with Dust, then your work with Vineyard Music, your own solo material and of course Verra Cruz. What are the most important lessons you've learned about being a musician, gigging, recording and writing songs?***

I think that it's important to be your self, to become comfortable with who you are. It definitely helps to have a Christian perspective, because you can see that we are all made by God, our gifts come from him and we in some way reflect his character in a unique way. each human voice is unique, so although it's good to take on board influences and to get better at what we do, we are in one way at our best when we are being ourselves.

***Describe yourself in five words.***

That is a hard question... son, husband, brother, believer, saved sinner, ok that's 6

***You have a very bluesy style. Who inspired you to pick up a guitar? What would you say are your biggest influences?***

It was a mixture of things really. we had a guitar in the house and my sister was a really great classical guitarist, so she inspired me and taught me my first chords, ("wild thing" if I remember correctly)

In my first guitar lesson my guitar teacher martin taught me the blues scale and I was off. I just remember thinking "wow this is really easy". around that time Eric Clapton was doing a long run of shows at the Albert hall playing with blues legends like buddy guy and Albert Collins. they were broadcast on the radio and I taped them all and played along in my bedroom. then I was really into Hendrix, he was another level, there seemed like a deep mystery to his sound, some people could make the guitar cry, he could make it scream!!!

***The lap steel is also a big part of your musicianship. What's the story behind you picking that up?***

Me, Jimmy and Brenton Brown were invited to Nashville to show case some of the new vineyard UK songs. the trip was covered so me and jimmy asked to stay on for a few extra days. We had met a guy called pastor bob in the UK he had liked the band and given us an open invitation at his place in Nashville , so we called him up for a place to stay. he happily obliged and we rented a car and took a trip to Memphis for the day. jimmy was looking for a new snare drum, and I was looking for.....something special.

After visiting sun studios and Graceland and trawling around the Memphis ' many music

shops, a small shop caught my eye. we swung in the car and were greeted by a friendly young dude called Billy Hatcher. jimmy was making muso small talk and I was sifting through the guitars at the back of the shop. I came across the lap steel, not really knowing what it was and viewing the affordable price tag I requested a try out. it was at this point that my ineptitude on the instrument became clear. I had no idea what it was tuned to or how to go about playing it. Hatcher stepped in and showed me the ropes.

He also told me that the steel had been in storage at a gospel church for many years and dated back to 1938. It was a great feeling when the cash point released me the \$270 and I walked away with a piece of history.

### ***What's your favorite guitar gear?***

I'm not big into gear really; I tend to be happy playing through anything half decent. at the moment I play through a messa combo and a fender bandmaster amps. I don't really use many pedals. I have a dyna comp that I bought from tre Shepard of 100 hours and a fuzz face pedal. most of the sound is amp and guitar, and fingers!

### ***You've written some well-known church songs and made a name for yourself as a worship leader. How have you found leading a rock band that prioritises pub gigs and gets reviewed in Kerrang in relation to the congregational worship side of your musicianship? Do the two get along? Is it easy to be a performer one night and a worship leader the next?***

I have been really lucky to have been supported in both things. I think doing the rock thing has been a tougher road than the worship thing. I have never really tried to push being a worship leader. it seems to sit more comfortably in a church setting for me. I lead worship in Canada recently at a youth even called deeper, and I actually did a verra cruz song in worship, and people really connected with it. so I guess it comes down to trying to be true to yourself in both situations, and maintain integrity and honesty as much as possible.

Ideally we want the same heart to come through where ever we are playing, it can be a problem rocking to loud in churches.....

You usually get more people at a worship do than a verra cruz gig, because God has more fans than we do.....

### ***How does Verra Cruz work as a band where each member is a Christian, yet not necessarily a Christian Band (if there is such a thing?) Do you have any rhetoric on what you do and don't say in your lyrics or places/situations you will or won't play?***

Really the question we are all to wrestle with is what it means to follow Jesus. Each of us has to work that out in the situation that we are in. It's hard to be an under cover Christian, at the same time Jesus spoke in parables, but he also did lots of other stuff like healing the sick, and confronting dark powers behind the authorities of the day. so you have to work it out in fear and trembling. We are all really serious about that in this band. At times we have compromised too much and at times we have been pressured to be too religious. But you live and learn. We feel that we have a good balance at the moment. it's a good time for us.

***Verra Cruz had some gigs in the states before you were that well known in the UK . How did the American audience react to your music? Did they get the blues thing quicker than the UK?***

The American thing was basically a lot of small showcase gigs, we had some success on American rock radio but we never really got to rock the big audiences out there.

Strangely enough getting played on the radio in the states opened up a lot of UK radio for us.

The Americans love British blues based rock that's for sure, bands like led zeppelin, cream, free, were and are huge over there. even Hendrix had to come to England to make it and then be exported back to the states! so there is a ping pong going on with music. back and forth over the Atlantic.

***Where do you see Verra Cruz in five years time?***

No idea....would like to have done a few more albums and a few more tours! south America maybe!!!

***Do you have a particular position on how Christian musicians and bands could, should or would relate the Gospel to non-Christians?***

I guess with love....that's the whole point of the gospel after all. I think people can sniff out bad motives a mile off.

It's not music that saves people, its God. You don't have to be famous to be effective. God can use any one. You don't have to be cool.

We always say that we want to be the donkey that carries in Jesus. not sure where we heard that but it's cool saying.

***Do you have anything to say to Nth Degree as a community?***

keep rocking!

***You're quite passionate about certain social issues. You have an opportunity here to make known some of those injustices. Tell us about what's on your heart.***

I wrote the song "deliver us" as a response to a booklet I read called a "matter of life and death" a biblical look at the UK arms industry. It was really heart breaking to see how much destruction and pain comes into the world through the trade of weapons.

there are people making serious cash out of the trade of death, often these companies are seen as great institutions of our country. Respectable and honest. scratches bellow the surface and the true nature is pretty dark.

Things like this are hard to face up to... much easier to go on with life and pretend everything is ok. pretend that our taxes don't subsidize this industry, pretend that our hands are clean of the blood of innocent and poorer people.

Cold comforts blinding me  
respectable is the beast  
from chains I will not see  
grief waiting to release

check out [www.caat.org.uk](http://www.caat.org.uk)

there is a whole Christian wing to this organisation and days of prayer and action etc