



RIGHT



BY DANIELLE NYE POULTER

Standing tall while sitting at the piano, William Joseph shares his testimony through music.

Imagine being offered an appearance on the hottest prime-time television show in the country. Millions of people will see your face and hear your name. This appearance could catapult you to worldwide fame.

Now imagine turning it down.

For pianist William Joseph, this wasn't an imaginary test. The show would have given him the opportunity to play his music for his biggest audience yet. Unfortunately, this show also promoted immorality, deceit, and other things William didn't want his name associated with. What would you do?



ON KEY

“I was totally torn,” says William. “I knew what the right thing to do was, but it was literally a choice in front of me of riches and fame or choosing the right.”

This wasn’t the first time William faced such a choice. Just a few years earlier, when he was 18, William’s music career was just taking off. Then came the choice to set it aside for two years to serve a mission. For William, standing up for the right plays an even bigger role in his life than music—and that’s saying something.

Trained as a classical pianist, William displayed incredible talent as a performer and composer early on. He didn’t come from a musical home, but his parents recognized his interest in piano at the age of four, and from then on music became his refuge, creative outlet, and almost constant companion.

He began performing publicly at age 12 and was well



Whether he's playing on a national concert tour or with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir (see photos) William says he has opportunities to share the gospel every day.

known for his talent in his hometown of Phoenix, Arizona, by the time he was 18. That's when William faced his first major choice between right and wrong.

"I was very into music in high school, and I always just thought a mission was not for me," William says.

Then he was asked to play the piano in sacrament meeting at his cousin's ward. He says at the time he wasn't feeling the Spirit strongly in his life and was only going to Church out of respect for his parents. He says, "I showed up, and I remember seeing a couple there, and they were just glowing. I couldn't stop looking at them, they were so happy."

William overheard the couple discussing how they had just been sealed in the temple the day before. He says, "I was just awestruck by how happy they seemed and how righteous they looked. I thought to myself, 'I want that; I want to marry a righteous girl in the temple.'"

But given the current strength of his

testimony, William had doubts about the possibility of his goal. "I thought, 'How will I ever do that? Someone like that would only want a returned missionary.' And right when I thought that, it hit me. It was overwhelming. All of a sudden, music didn't matter; my career didn't matter; nothing mattered. And I knew for sure that's what I had to do. I needed to go on a mission, and I'd be blessed if I did."

William says he recognized the change that had taken place in him by the music he was drawn to. "After that meeting, after that incredible, spiritual experience, I got in my car, and I had this rock music blasting. That music felt so disruptive, so loud and just ugly and wrong. That was the experience that changed my life."

After receiving a call to the Australia Perth Mission, William faced another dilemma—not only would he be giving up his music career, but he learned that very little music of any kind would be permitted on his mission. Two years without music seemed impossible for William, who hadn't gone a day without music in 15 years. But his testimony of the gospel was now firm, and he trusted in the Lord's wisdom in sending him to this mission.

Fortunately, William's mission president recognized his special talent. Over the course of his mission, William had the opportunity to both write and perform music. He says, "I was a missionary first and a musician second." He performed at special firesides, where investigators were touched by the Spirit and doors were opened for the missionaries. William never regretted the choice he made to accept a call to serve a mission.

When he returned home, William picked up his music career where he had left off, gaining a strong fan base through self-released albums. His incredible talent with the piano enabled him to compose his own



New Age-style pieces, while at the same time performing classical pieces to perfection. His unique style soon caught the attention of producer David Foster, senior vice president of Warner Brothers records, who happened to be in Phoenix for a charity event.

“I was introduced to David four hours before the event, during sound check. The person who introduced me asked, ‘Could he play your piano?’ and David said, ‘Yeah, yeah, bring him up.’” David put William on stage and instructed him to “play something.”

“I definitely felt like this would be a good time to not mess up,” William says. He began to play a song he had written called “Within.” After just a few seconds, David led the band on stage to play along.

“I’m totally playing my heart out, and the next thing I know I’m playing with this world-class band, and they join in on the spot, while David’s conducting over me. And, when I finished, everyone in the room was clapping. He gave me a high-five and said, ‘What was that song?’ I said that it was a song that I wrote, and he said, ‘I want you to come back tonight for the show.’ It was the biggest show of the year in Arizona, and he said, ‘You’re going to open the show.’”

After a successful performance at the concert, David Foster signed William to a record deal, and they produced an album in only two months. He opened for Josh Groban’s 2004 tour, and toured with Clay Aiken in 2005.

With so much fame coming so quickly, William has had to keep his focus firmly on the gospel to guide his choices. But even in Hollywood, his commitment to choosing the right has gained him respect.

When William decided to turn down the television appearance, he explained his decision to his producer by saying, “‘The things that are on this show make a mockery of everything that I believe.’ That’s all I had to say, and he just said, ‘Then don’t do it.’ And he said, ‘Your morals will serve you well.’”

So far, though, William’s moral standards have been a positive influence on others. “I have opportunities to share the gospel every day,” William says. “When I’m performing, and I use clean humor, people ask questions.” While on tour, William will get up early Sunday morning after a performance Saturday night and take a taxi to church. “That always leads to opportunities to talk about the gospel,” he says.



While his example doesn’t go unnoticed, perhaps William’s greatest missionary tool is his music.

“When people hear my music, they can feel something in it. They want to know what it is. They can just feel a difference.”

William has seen people react to his music in all kinds of places—from firesides on his mission, to Hollywood benefit concerts, and even playing his music in malls.

“In a mall you have all walks of life, and I remember seeing the roughest people. But they’d come up to me in tears, saying how beautiful the music was.”

William says good music speaks to everyone’s spirit. “Music breaks down barriers; it softens people. It’s opened so many doors for me, as far as being able to talk to people and relate to people. I’ve just seen it prepare people.”

William says he is grateful that he was born with a love and a passion for music. Through his incredible talent, he has been able to bless the lives of others and to stand as a witness of Christ against the pressures of the world. But in the end, William says everything he does is to glorify God.

“I’m not a man of many words; I’m not an elaborate speaker. But I absolutely have a testimony. I love the gospel.” And that love speaks through both his music and his example. **NE**

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