

Anthropology 200  
Fieldwork paper

Monique Santos

## Worship Leaders

- I. Who are they?
  - a. Age
  - b. Denomination
  - c. Background
    - i. Religious family?
    - ii. Membership in church
- II. What they do
  - a. What instrument
  - b. How did they learn to play
  - c. How long have they lead worship
  - d. How much do they practice
- III. Actual Worship Service
  - a. Preparation
  - b. Coordination of music with sermon
  - c. What is the purpose of the worship team
- IV. What motivates them
  - a. How did it start
  - b. Will it continue and in what form

In many organized religious services, a leader or emcee directs how the service is organized and presented. This emcee is variously found in the form of a priest, rabbi, minister or pastor. Also in many organized religious services, music is performed. In Buddhist services, a gong continually sounds as the priests file in; at the start of many traditional Christian services a choir may enter the church singing a processional hymn signaling the start of the service; for a fairly new denomination of church such as the Four Square <sup>(1)</sup> denomination, service attendees are greeted by the sound of guitars and drums by a group that resembles more a rock and roll band than the traditional choir in robes and stoles. This para-rock and roll band is called a “worship team” and worship team leaders are the emcees for the music portion of the service.

At a Friday night service that is geared toward the college students, a local Four Square church was a beehive of activity. The main church service was beginning and pop Christian music was being performed and piped outside via small speakers in the courtyard. There were large groups of middle school, high school and college students milling around. Each of these groups has their own service tailored to their age group. Singularity and Tuff Moses are worship leaders for the middle school service. Singularity is 15 years old and he plays the drums. Singularity has been playing with his worship team for about 4 months. Tuff Moses is also 15 and he plays lead guitar. Tuff Moses has been on the worship team for 1 year and says “we aren’t the official worship leaders but the official leader is so busy, that we all just take turns leading the worship team for the middle school services.”

“I got my start in music because of my brother Ben” Singularity says “my brother plays these weird instruments like the banjo. My mom and dad are not musical at all but they like to listen to me and my brother play.” Tuff Moses says “my mom sings and my dad plays guitar, but not as good as I want him too, he is actually pretty bad! I’ve been in the worship band for a few months then I asked Singularity to join up. Our band has four members, and we get together and practice about once a week.” The middle school service they lead is on Sunday morning and both Tuff and Singularity say “we like coming to the Friday night college service so we can listen to this service’s worship team. We don’t really prepare for our service. We really do practice but, we don’t have a list of

songs that we work off of. So we end up just doing our own thing and don't coordinate our music with the sermon presented that night. Most nights we just wing it and just play what ever comes to mind."

"We play for kids who are couple years younger than we are, but if we were to play for an older audience we would practice a whole lot more and be more professional. We want to be able to play for a larger and older group and it would be cool if we could play for events separate from the church such as school functions or at Living Stone, a Christian coffee shop in Pearl City." Singularity also says "I like all kinds of music but mostly Christian pop, I believe that my musical talent is God given and that God blessed my instrument. So when I play I really do want to set a good example to the younger crowd I play for and not be a hypocrite, because some people come to church and act one way and then as soon as they leave they act totally different, I really disagree with that and I don't want the little kids seeing me be a Christian at church and then a punk at school."

Tuff Moses tells that "my motivation to take time to practice and lead worship is because I've gone through a lot in my life so far. I have experienced family problems that I don't wanna talk about but I just really wanted to repay God for being there for me". I have always gone to church and I feel that playing music was a way to express my thanks". Tuff Moses and Singularity both say "that playing in a band that leads worship gives us the opportunity to be a good example for the younger kids at the church and also gives us a chance to do something that we like to do anyway, which is play music. It feels good to be able to do two things we really feel strongly about, which is play music and worship God".

Next to a coffee cart, a few guys were setting up turntables and microphones for an after service program they have called 'Crash'. Crash is held after the Friday night church service program, and started about one month ago by the college pastor, Rick, who is also the college worship leader. Friday nights are geared mostly for young adults and college-aged people and Rick explained "my motivation in creating Crash was to do something every week in an effort to reach out and do something that would attract someone from the outside and not make it so recognizable as what most kids think of as

church. I wanted to give something for the college-aged kids to do on Friday nights other than go out and party. I never had anything like this when I was younger, and it was such a bummer to go to church. With Crash it's more of a party atmosphere with a hint of Christianity, so it's less threatening and non-Christians won't feel totally out of place. I mean, if you just drove up and saw this, you wouldn't think this was a church service. It's more of being able to crash, like when you crash at a friend's house, and in this case the friend is God."

Tonight's Crash program would consist of the DJ playing 'beats' and then people getting up and 'freestyling' and 'spitting' <sup>(2)</sup> and then a testimony to follow. The DJ and emcee for the Crash program, are Denzer and Edwin. Edwin the emcee is 23 years old and of Filipino descent. He was dressed in jeans and a plaid flannel shirt, had piercings in his ears and lower lip. "I've been emceeing and DJ'ing for about 10 years for underground and hip-hop shows. I accepted Christ into my life, I think in 2000, but even if I wasn't I Christian I would still DJ and emcee shows. I don't do these shows to provide a message or help spread Christianity, I just do this because it's different music than what I usually 'spin'. I look at it that music is my driver and I do these shows for my own enjoyment, if people get something out of being here, then that's all good" Edwin says.

The 'beats' specialist is Bob. "I specialize in beats because keeping a nice background helps when you freestyle. It creates the atmosphere and keeps the spitter on cue. I have been a Christian for about 4 years. I guess you could say I'm hardcore, because I'm the only one in my family that goes to church or reads the bible! I try to get them to go with me, but I get shut down. I like that Rick created Crash, 'cause now I can have a way to show what I do for worship. I think some old people think that worship is opening that song book and the organ and choir stuff, but it's way more than that, and you're not going to get young people's interest that way. I have been laying down tracks since high school and then when I became a Christian I got into Christian punk shows. It is so cool to see shows that are punk on the outside and Christian on the inside. For a while I was really down, a chick broke my heart, so I wasn't feeling it, ya know what I mean. But God kept talking to me and I had to listen to Him and got involved with this

church that lets me do my thing. I don't like when you go to a church and you have to fit into a certain mold, I actually hate that. Here, Rick and Edwin are cool about it. I think that my style of worship is just how I do things. I don't have a crazy sob story to tell you but what I can say is that God created a lot of different people, so there has to be a lot of different ways to tell him you are listening to Him and following Him, not what is typical. I know some people think that having a rage at a church is wrong but I think that God is totally cool with it because it lets us be us".

Worship on the first Thursday night of each month is lead by Pancake. Pancake is a 20 year-old freshman at UH and has been playing the guitar for about 6 years. He took formal lessons for 2 years and then taught himself from then on. He has been the 'worship night' worship leader for the past two years. "Worship night started out as a mini-church for college students and it then evolved into a night of singing and fellowship rather than a formal mid-week church service". When asked what exactly is 'worship' Pancake explains "worship for me is a medium to enter into God's presence, a form of expression and that music is only one facet of the idea of worship. It is an attitude that I carry daily. I have been going to this church since 7<sup>th</sup> grade, and I actually became a Christian when I was in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. I probably seriously practice about once a week and the format of the service just has me leading the songs and just playing my guitar so it's kinda informal. I always have my guitar with me so I probably practice randomly more than I realize. I think that God gave me a gift and I feel I need to use it to glorify God. My music is not about church, church is just a building. My personal relationship with God is the most important thing, and being a worship leader has helped me be more sensitive to others needs, because when I practice and play guitar I have to focus – so now when I talk with other people I can focus on them. Right now I am in the Coast Guard Reserves and when my commitment to the Coast Guard is over, I want to travel and take my guitar with me, so that will give me an opportunity to lift people up and play guitar all at the same time."

Jesus808 and Attimis are trying to put together a band and they want to call it "The Week Ends". Jesus808 is 21 and has been a Christian since he was 17 or 18. He has an AA degree from Sonoma State College in California "I went to college on a football

scholarship, but then found out I like music more”. He currently is a carpet cleaning technician. “I’ve been playing guitar for about 8 years now, I taught myself. My mom used to sing in a church choir, she sings really good so that’s how I got into music. I started playing guitar in a youth group and then a leader from another youth group asked me to play for them. It started to snowball from there, and now I am like a freelance worship leader. I play at 3 different church’s, Bethel, Full Gospel and a Foursquare Church. I don’t practice a lot, I just rush ‘em! Besides Gods tells me what to do. One church wanted more structure but I couldn’t operate that way so I stopped going there. I play every Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday. People hear about me through word of mouth, so it keeps me busy. Worship for me is all about surrender, to come and understand God. I even think that surfing is worship, I can paddle away the world and be in God’s water world. I sing in the water and it brings me closer to God. My goal of worship so that God can hear me and I can get to know Him. When I wasn’t following what God was telling me to do, I didn’t lead worship, because my head and my heart were in the wrong place. My future is to make music and be happy, I think I could be homeless and still be happy as long as I have God. Our new band still needs a drummer and once we find one, that will be another way to go out and play music and worship God”.

The other member of the group “The Week Ends” is Attimis. Attimis is 21 years old and has been a Christian since he was 13 “I accepted Jesus when I was 13, but I didn’t start really following Him until last year, so I guess that means I wasn’t really a Christian until last year, huh? I have only been playing guitar for like 9 months, it’s crazy and now Jesus808 wants me to play in a group. I got my music skillets from my moms. She is a nuts piano player and sings too, I think it rubbed off on me. I always wanted to play guitar, I actually always had one, but I didn’t start playing until I had a broken heart and want to sing the blues! I think the guitar is my outlet for my emotions and the guitar is what led me to God. Sometimes I get together with Pancake and we just jam. Or a group just calls each other and randomly gets together to play. I really like the random aspect because it’s more like God is calling us. Worship for me is surrendering and being obedient, it’s part of my walk with God. God wants me to flow with Him, and then He

can flow through me to other people. I think I worship because it makes me feel happy. I actually don't like current Christian music that is out there, I would rather not listen to it all – I'd rather just play. I wanna be active not passive. Some of the music is so Disneyland and it's not real. I want The Week Ends to be successful, but then success is not financial but it's being able to touch people and help them. It would be cool if everyone knew about The Week End's but I'm cool with just jamming.”

Just as people come in all shapes and sizes, so does their method of worship. Tuff Moses, Singularity, Edwin, Bob, Rick, Pancake, Jesus808 and Attimis are given the title of worship leader by their respective churches. They all came to these positions in various ways and worship in ways that are as unique as they are themselves.

1. Four Square churches were founded by Amine Semple McPherson in July 1922, as stated in the denominations site [www.Foursquare.org](http://www.Foursquare.org). My remark that the Four Square denomination is “fairly new” is based on a comparison to other Christian denominations such as Lutheran’s which were founded approximately 1530 or Methodists founded in 1800’s or Mormons founded in 1820’s.
2. “Beats’ refers to the background music that is played while a person is “freestyling” or “spitting” . Beats are just musical tracks with little to no lyrics that have a good beat to it. Freestyling and spitting is poetry or spoken lyrics – totally extemporaneous, not practiced or even written down. All the words come from the heart. Rage is slang terminology for a party that is wild and out of control.