

# Musician blends Christian, country, rock

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By **SUSAN RANDALL**,  
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Jim Hughes started singing with the radio in 1958 while his mom did the laundry. He was 5 and could twist and sing at the same time.

"She had me all dressed up like Elvis," he said.

He learned to play the guitar in 1972 and three years later became a Christian, but he didn't know any Christian songs. He only knew bar songs, so he sang them with Christian lyrics.

"It's called a parody when you change the words," Hughes said. Weird Al Yankovic does parodies. Martin Luther did them in the 1500s. Luther's "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" was a bar song, he said.

"He just put Christian words to it. Parodies have been going on for a long time."

One of the first Christian songs Hughes learned was "Amazing Grace," but he learned it to the tune of "House of the Rising Sun."

"This was already an established 'Jesus freak' song back in those days," he said.

He and three preachers were ministering in prisons, missions and halfway houses in Nevada in the late 1980s. They were doing a two-day revival at a Salvation Army mission, and its clients had to attend the services if they wanted a bed for the night. Hughes started singing songs from the mission's 40-year-old hymn books, and the crowd sat with arms crossed, faces that said, "Make me sing."

"After the second song, I said, 'Man, this is a rough crowd.' So I broke out 'Amazing Grace' to the 'House of the Rising Sun.' By the time I hit that last note, they're hanging on the chandeliers. They're shouting. They're just going crazy, and someone in the back of the room goes: 'All right, now do 'Stairway to Heaven.'"

It was the most popular rock 'n' roll song of all time, he said, and he didn't have it in his repertoire.

"That night the Lord gave it to me."



Steven King/Dispatch

**Jim Hughes is ready to pick his guitar and sing a tune just about any time. He's trying to raise money through Kickstarter to buy more equipment so he can take his music routine on tour.**

The lyrics to "Old Rugged Cross" came to him, and they fit "Stairway to Heaven." The next night he played it at the mission house, and the crowd went crazy. Hughes took the Rolling Stones' "Honky Tonk Women," wrote new lyrics and turned it into "Homegrown Christian."

One day he and his friends were at 24th Street and Van Buren in Phoenix, where the state evaluated incoming prisoners before sending them to a prison.

"So I start singing my songs," he said, "and by the time I get to 'Homegrown Christian,' I'm jumping up and down with my guitar, and they are all rocking and screaming." Thirty men came up afterward and

thanked him.

Hughes wrote parodies of other people's songs, then started writing original Christian and country songs.

A friend gave him a microphone that plugged into his laptop. He had written and copyrighted more than 50 songs but had never recorded any of them, because he thought he would have to pay royalties on the parodies.

"I found out that because they are parodies that the copyright is totally mine," he said. "It's like a political statement or cartoon. You can do that with something public."

His first CD was "The Darnel," based on Jesus' parable about the farmer who sows wheat, and the

enemy sneaks in and sows weeds.

He has a bachelor's degree in graphic design and video production, so he created his own album cover and song list with lyrics.

Then came his first original country-rock album, "Finding Hope."

"Wouldn't you know it, an old hippy, Jesus freak writing country songs," he said.

Next came "Homegrown Christian," which includes "Stairway." He illustrated it with video clips from "The Passion of the Christ" and put it on YouTube.

His second country-rock album was "No Boundaries," which is all original music. Then came "Under Anointing I," which includes songs sung partly in tongues.

Hughes said he sent his albums to Amazon's "CreateSpace" for publishing, and it suggested he look into Kickstarter.com to fund new projects.

Kickstarter is a crowd sourcing website, where artists, filmmakers, musicians and other creative people can raise funds for new projects.

Creators set funding goals and deadlines. Anyone who likes a project can pledge support, and most creators offer rewards for pledges if they reach the goal. Hughes, for example, promised a digital copy of an album of choice for a \$10 pledge.

"With Kickstarter it's all or nothing," Hughes said. "You either meet your goal or nobody is out any money and you don't get anything."

His goal is to raise \$1,000 by Sept. 30 to buy a small amplifier and public address system so he can go on tour and do concerts in coffee houses and private homes.

"I could never have done any of this in '94 when I started," he said. "You had to go to a studio. You had to go to a record label to get these published."

He did everything with a laptop computer.

*Readers can find videos, samples of Hughes' songs and a link to his [kickstarter.com](http://kickstarter.com) page on his website, [www.hughesongs.com](http://www.hughesongs.com).*