



How does one become a minister, a social worker, and a singer songwriter all at the same time? A look at Michael Vincent can begin to answer that question, at least in the case of this one Northern California folk rock songwriter who lives near the ocean and works with people who are hungry, homeless, and often mentally ill.

In the middle of Northern California's affluent tech corridor you can find a significant number of people who are not living the infamous Silicon Valley Dream. People with little to no resources and fewer options in a place that many people feel is the new promised land. It is here, on these streets and with these people, you will find Michael Vincent - singer/songwriter, progressive minister, social case worker, performing musician - who has been blending the seemingly disparate parts of himself, and the community of which he is a part, for the better part of thirty years.

*“My faith informs my politics. That’s not to say that God told me to believe and practice my faith in a particularly absolutist manner, but rather that my personal understanding of my faith and its traditions instructs me to be aware of, and most especially join with, those on the margins.”*

Michael grew up near Portland, Maine but moved to sunny Southern California two weeks before his 13th birthday. Despite his teen years amid the musical and political upheaval of late 60s Southern California, Michael became a member of his high school Young Republicans, advocating for U.S. involvement in Vietnam and planning a career path as a corporate lawyer. It was in his late teens, when he was invited to a nearby fundamentalist church, that Michael began a religious path that his parents, nor those in the church he began attending, could or would understand.

*“A friend from business law class invited me to a fundamentalist church to hear a talk on evolution. It was really bad science but the church had some really cute girls, so I stuck around. When someone gave me a copy of Good News for Modern Man [a modern language translation of the New Testament] I all of a sudden fell in love with this hippie Jesus vision that seemed to be on the side of those on the margins.”*

At about this same time, Michael's childhood interest in popular music began leading to a point where he felt the desire to do something more than just listen to the music that he loved. He wanted to write and sing and play it too.

Michael began playing guitar at age 20 gleaning his personal style from the likes of Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, and country rock styled bands like America, however his true calling was toward the “Jesus Music” that was a growing subculture in the early 70s.

Michael began writing songs with friends from church, forming bands and playing for, and occasionally with, the gospel rock artists of the day.

In the spring of 1977, feeling the call to ministry, Michael completed a BA at San Jose State and followed that with Masters studies in Divinity and Social Work at Golden Gate Seminary in Mill Valley. By this time Michael was married with two kids and the juggling of work, family, school, music, and ministry was a bit like spinning plates. Writing songs and playing music was one of the things that kept Michael's plates up in the air. Working in community ministry, with homeless refugees and the mentally ill residents of board and care homes was what kept his feet on the ground.

With graduation from seminary, Michael found, for the second time in his life, that the church work he believed in, and felt he was called to, proved to be at odds with the people in the denomination as a whole. His plans to take the training he received and move into social ministry with the Southern Baptist Church were immediately squashed when he found himself blacklisted for being a part of Dolores Street Baptist Church where he attended and worked during seminary. The church's political stance on issues of Peace and Justice, and their emphatic support of church members from San Francisco's LGBT community had left him "untouchable."

Michael found work as the pastor of a progressive church in the South Bay where he had spent so much time growing up. At the same time, he returned to working with people in deep need, through a position with Urban Ministries of Palo Alto. All this time, he continued to strive to join these disparate parts with the musical expression he loved so much.

*"For me, spirituality is not separate from the so-called material world and our activities therein. To be spiritual is to have a significantly greater connection with the human condition, and ally ourselves with the needs of others, rather than to simply have pleasant spiritual experiences that cause our hearts to glow."*

As the years have passed, the work and the music have grown together and continue to inform each other, and Michael's original connection to a specifically Christian style of popular music has given way to a much wider range of interest. From the ups and downs of personal relationship, to the homegrown casualties of war and the overlooked victims of contemporary society, Michael's music leaps across easily defined categories to flesh out daily life in lyrical form.

*I think it's more that the music is informed by the religio-political part of my life, but the music itself really isn't about that. I write songs about life in all kinds of musical styles, and those songs are influenced by my particular point of view.*

Michael's style of performing has gone through some changes as well. While he still enjoys pulling out some big rock songs and playing with a band, he's also finding opportunities for more personal concerts in more intimate settings.

*“I’ve recently gotten involved in the SF open mic scene and they’re a community of musicians who really support each other. I want to become more of a part of that.”*

Recently, Michael participated in a series of concerts to benefit “Sing Out Of The Darkness,” a local non-profit dedicated to helping in suicide prevention. Michael found both the cause, and the performance a natural fit.

*“So here I am doing the helping profession thing again, but in this case it’s coming through the songs themselves. I want to do more of that, in small venues and bigger venues as well. Wherever there’s an opportunity to share the spirit in me through the songs and make those connections with people in the audience and resonate with what they’re experiencing as well.”*

Michael is excited about these new directions in his music and he says he’s looking forward to what he expects to be a wide variety of musical settings and opportunities.

*I’ve really settled into a good spot in my life where it isn’t about some sort of big rock star dreams, but it’s about the music, and about just putting yourself out there. I have a feeling there’s more to come, in terms of bigger stages and things like that, but that’s not what I’m aiming for. I feel like I’m making a difference and I plan on being around, and doing that, for a long time.”*