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Church musician gives tunes away

Web frees Mauldin resident from corporate bondage

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By Ron Barnett
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Don Chapman has found the key to success and happiness.

Give your best stuff away.

From a spare room in his Mauldin apartment, Chapman creates and gives away music around the world via the Internet. And the world is beating a path to his door.

"You read in the paper all the time about record companies suing people who are downloading music, and basically that's how I'm making my living, by letting people download my music for free," he said.

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More than 60,000 churches subscribe to his free newsletter for contemporary Christian musicians called [WorshipIdeas.com](#), he said.

There, they can get all



zOOM

Making music: Don Chapman works from his home studio in Mauldin.

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kinds of ideas about how to make praise bands sound better and to improve the worship experience in churches, complete with plenty of free high-tech goodies.

They can go to another of his sites, PraiseSongStore.com, and download free MP3's of songs he has written.

If they like the music, they can come back and buy sheet music from the site. That's where Chapman makes his living.

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WE'RE EXACTLY WHERE YOU WANT TO BE!

"This has just gone berserk," the 39-year-old Mauldin native said, laughing. "It's really done well financially, and I have all these toys and stuff to play with."

Even before the Internet came along, Chapman had figured out that there were better ways to get your music out than dealing with the record companies.

A 1989 Bob Jones University graduate in church music, he left his fundamentalist roots to branch out into contemporary Christian music and went to Nashville to pursue his career.

"Everywhere I looked, it was people starving and frustrated -- I mean people really high up, producing," he said. "They were just being yanked around by the industry. So I thought, 'Well, maybe I'll try it on my own.'"

He started making his own CDs and sold 20,000 copies in Christian bookstores.

But shipping all those packages was a chore.

Then came the Internet.

"Now, instead of shipping stuff it's all downloading. And it's automated too," he said.

Chapman is offering music and information no one else has, but he's not alone in the burgeoning business of using the Web to offer worship materials.

Greg Atkinson, a 30-year-old Greer native, is now part-owner of a Dallas-based organization called WorshipHouse Media, which sells video backgrounds, graphics

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and photos via the Internet for use in worship.

"It's definitely a growing area, and not necessarily just contemporary churches," he said.

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He met Chapman at a conference where both were speaking.

"Don has a great resources," Atkinson said. "I've told a lot of people about him and what he's doing."



Jeff Lutz, music director of Parkway Baptist Church in Bardstown, Ky., says Chapman's products have helped him add variety to his praise band's repertoire and improve the quality of his program.

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"I use it quite a bit, articles and ideas to help along the way," said Lutz, who leads a band with about 20 instrumentalists at a church of 950 members.

"I've never talked to him -- just e-mailed back and forth," Lutz said. "He's a super nice guy. He's been very helpful."

Not only are Chapman's customers all over the world, but his collaborators are, too.

He wrote a Christmas song with a singer in England that was downloaded 8,000 times during December.

"People will send me (a link) on the Internet where their church has done this song, and I can watch it," Chapman said. "It's really amazing that this song is going out and being sung as much as if it were on a record label."

He can create all the sounds of an orchestra and a pop music band from his keyboard. After recording the music, he e-mails it to singers in Nashville or to his friend in England, who record their parts and e-mail the song back to him.

Lately, Chapman's fame in praise-band circles had drawn him into the conference circuit.

"You proclaim you're an expert and suddenly you become one," he said. "It's funny."

David Red, music director for the Southern Baptist Conference of New Mexico, which sponsored a conference Chapman spoke at last week, said churches across that state use Chapman's contemporary arrangements of traditional hymns.

"We use a lot of Don's material off his Web site for blending music and worship and giving music a flow during the worship service," he said. "It's certainly a needed tool."

Chapman has a special Web site for his hymn arrangements, and another one called

WorshipFlow.com that helps musicians learn to improvise.

"I never can sleep at night, I get so excited just playing with this stuff," he said. "It's like being a little kid."

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