

Austins Bridge Biography

Country roots run deep when it comes to soulful singers Mike Kofahl, Justin Rivers and Jason Baird. Nashville based trio, Austins Bridge, has grown up with an embedded passion to sing and write and they are ready to share it with the world. The story began in early 2006 when Mike and Jason joined Justin (formally of the Crabb Family) to form an all male trio named Austins Bridge. Their southern sound mixed with a bit of country and bluegrass promises to set this group apart. As former music ministers, Austins Bridge has a passion for the church. Their mission is to build up the body of Christ, and reach as many unbelievers with the message as possible. While bridging the gap between different genres of music, they want to show the world that the gospel can be portrayed through different types of music and still have a huge affect on people. Their determination and drive, partnered with Daywind Records, promises to give a new listening experience to their audience.

Mike Kofahl, Justin Rivers and Jason Baird share a passion for music and a deep desire to spread the gospel. Combining their gifts to form Austin's Bridge, the guys are doing just that with an innovative flair that blends Southern Gospel, country and a touch of bluegrass into a soulful new sound.

The group's high-energy performances and soaring harmonies have drawn comparisons to multi-platinum country trio Rascal Flatts. While such comments are flattering, they don't do justice to the depth of talent and commitment to ministry that sets Austin's Bridge apart from other new acts looking to make a difference through music.

Though Austin's Bridge might be a new group, its young members are far from novices in the Christian music community. "I answered the call to ministry when I was about 11 years old," says Justin, a pastor's kid who was born and raised near Mobile, Alabama. "I went on the road and played piano for a group professionally and continued to go to high school and travel at the same time. Then after about seven years, God opened the door for me to be with the Crabb Family."

A gifted multi-instrumentalist, Justin plays piano, drums, bass, acoustic, electric guitar, banjo, mandolin, and fiddle. He had left the road and was leading worship at a church in Austin, pastored by Randy Phillips' of Phillips, Craig & Dean, when he got a call from his old friend Mike Kofahl. "I'd known Mike for about five years, relates Justin. "He calls me up one day and says, 'We're wanting to travel and sing.' I said, 'That's really where my heart is at too.' We all made an agreement that we're going to do this. I chose to leave Austin and move to Nashville, and God has opened doors for us."

Like Justin, Mike's father was also a pastor and he knew early in life that he wanted to go into ministry. "I decided to go to a Christian college and I had always loved to sing," he says. "I was singing in choirs in college. The Lord spoke to me through that and said, 'I want you to go on and pursue this.' That led me to my friends right here."

Jason also honed his musical chops performing with other groups before Austin's Bridge. Born in Ohio, Jason moved to Austin with his family as a toddler. During his junior year in high school, he began feeling called into ministry. He went to college and began working as a youth pastor and leading worship. A friend suggested he audition for Living Word, a touring group comparable to Truth. He won a slot and began traveling extensively with the group; doing four or five shows a week.

Each member brings a diverse set of influences to Austin's Bridge. "I was brought up around the jazz ensemble kind of stuff," says Jason. "I love tight harmonies."

Mike grew up listening to a lot of country music, including Bryan White. "He's an amazing songwriting and singer. I also grew up listening to the Oak Ridge Boys," says Mike. "My parents loved southern gospel music. They would listen to the Gaither Vocal Band all the time."

Justin recalls attending revivals growing up and loving gospel music. "Black gospel was a big part of my life--anything with soul in it," he says, citing such gospel greats as Donnie McClurkin, Kirk Franklin and J Moss among his favorite artists.

So just how did they combine those varied influences to develop the Austin's Bridge sound? "I don't think that it's anything that we really tried to come up with," says Jason recounting how the group's sound just developed organically. "It's one of those God things where he put three people together. It's not anything we have to work at to figure out. It just kind of happens."

Pressed to define how they'd categorize their unique sound, Mike replies "contemporary pop country bluegrass with a

little bit of funk.”

“I’ll go with that,” Jason says with a laugh. “There’s not really a group already out there that sounds like who we are.”

Before they signed with Daywind, a buzz was already spreading around the industry about Austin’s Bridge, and there was interest from mainstream country labels. As they looked at the options, the path was clear. “Our first priority is ministry,” states Mike. “That’s first and foremost, going forward and spreading the gospel. We all came to a prayerful agreement that we just didn’t feel any other market was right for what we were wanting to do. We felt best as presenting ourselves as a gospel group. If our music and our message migrates into another genre of music, that’s great because that’s the message going that much further, but we just felt that for Austin’s Bridge, spreading the word that we hold so close to our hearts is where it’s at.”

The members of Austin’s Bridge penned all but two cuts on their debut disc, with Justin carrying the bulk of the writer’s credits. “A lot of the songs have a message of hope,” says Justin citing “He Will Carry You” as a prime example. “We’ve had a lot of people come up and say that that song ministers to them in a special way.”

“I See Daylight” is a vibrant up-tempo song that showcases the group’s incredible harmony. “That song says even through your darkest storm, if you start praying, prayer can change the situation and you’ll see daylight,” says Justin. “The message of hope and salvation is really what we are trying to get across with this record.”

One of the most poignant songs on the record is “Life’s Too Short,” a cautionary tale about taking time for the people you love before it’s too late. “It’s a real song with a real message,” says Mike. “It hits home. The lyrics just penetrate your soul.”

“He’s in Control” is one of the songs already becoming a concert favorite. “We get a great response with that song when we do it live,” relates Justin, “because it says no matter what you are facing and no matter what the trauma is you are going through or how dark the situation seems, that Jesus Christ is in control of everything.”

Austin’s Bridge is well known for delivering a high-energy live show. “Personally, I think it’s the most exhilarating thing I’ve ever done,” says Jason of the trio’s on stage chemistry. To capture that chemistry in the studio and translate it to their debut CD, the trio worked with veteran producer Bubba Smith.

The result is a powerful debut from an innovative young group that is charting a new course in Christian music. “We don’t want to put ourselves in a box and say ‘We play this kind of music or we do that kind of music,’” says Justin. “We want to do it all. We always want to be pushing the limits.”

“We want to bridge the gap between different genres of music,” Mike adds. “We want to carry the message to as many people as we can.”