

A PRAISE DRUMMER

AN INTERVIEW WITH ZACH LIND OF JIMMY EAT WORLD
BY SCOTT MCCLELLAN

KEEPING TIME FOR ONE OF AMERICA'S BEST ROCK BANDS MIGHT

be the last place you (or maybe your grandmother) would expect to find a Christian, but that's exactly where you'll find Jimmy Eat World drummer Zach Lind. Though his is not a household name, you know his beats from Jimmy Eat World singles such as "Lucky Denver Mint," "The Middle," and "A Praise Chorus."

As the summer comes to a close, the band is doing typical rock band things such as touring the country while their sixth full-length release, *Chase This Light*, awaits its October release date. Lind, in between sold-out club shows, still finds the time to blog and podcast on topics such as theology, culture, and biblical interpretation—pretty atypical fare when it comes to rock stars.

On his blog, Finding Rhythm (www.FindingRhythm.com), Lind shares his views on God, religion, social justice, and politics, as well as what's on his reading list and notes from the road. Often his posts and the questions they pose result in an eruption of comment feedback, with viewpoints ranging from those in step with Lind to those who wish his beliefs were further right of center.

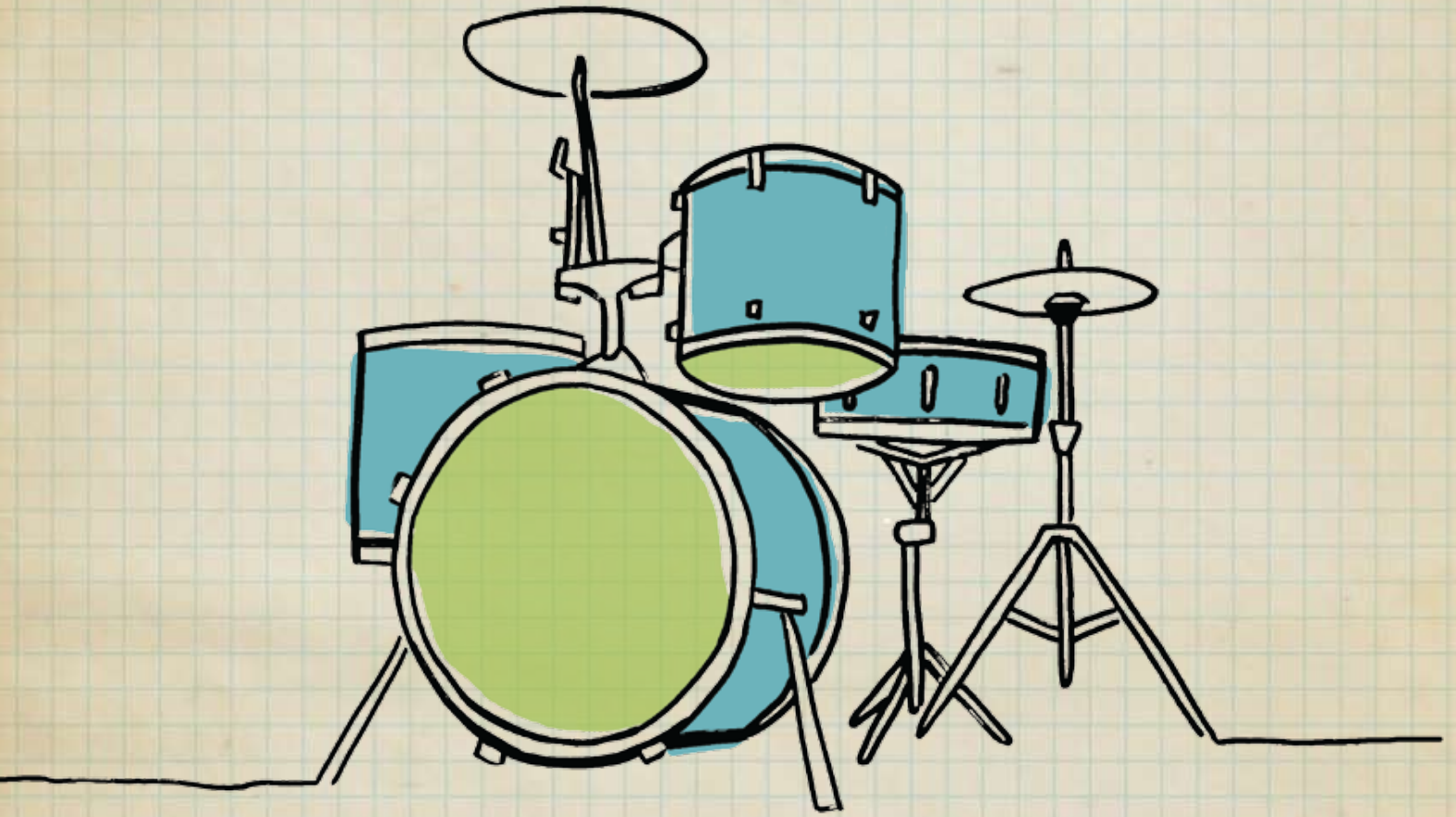
While, Lind's first podcast venture—"TheoHacks," a collaboration with John Chandler—is on extended hiatus, he can currently be heard co-hosting "Third Way Faith" with author Shane Hipps (*The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture*) on the premium podcasting network WiredParish.com. In "Third Way Faith," Lind and Hipps explore "emerging culture, media, church, and third-way faith."

As I spoke with Lind before his band's concert in Dallas, it became clear that Lind embodies a certain tension a lot of Christians live with: He is passionate about and committed to his faith, but he is wary of some of the trends and attitudes within the Church. As someone who makes his living entertaining the masses, Lind seems uncomfortable with any parallels of the entertainer and the entertained dynamic that surface in modern Christianity. In other words, the guy who has played chart-topping rock anthems in packed arenas around the world isn't looking for that same vibe on a Sunday morning.

Our conversation wandered from Jimmy Eat World to David Crowder to the business of Christian music to the Mennonite tradition, and I'm tempted to marvel at Lind's willingness to speak candidly on each topic. I suppose I shouldn't be all that surprised, though, because Lind embodies another tension we live with: Our lives are like an ever-evolving mosaic of music, art, faith, business, philosophy, and technology, where the lines between sacred and secular begin to blur, or perhaps disappear altogether.

COLLIDE: How is the tour going so far?

ZACH LIND: The tour's going really good. It's been an interesting tour for us. We're doing a lot of songs we don't normally play. We wanted to go out and do something during the summer. We didn't have anything planned, and we knew our record wouldn't be out until the fall anyway. We thought it'd be an interesting way to fill our time and to do something cool for the fans.



COLLIDE: Tell me about the new record, *Chase This Light*. That will be out October 16th, which will be about three years since the last full-length, *Futures*.

LIND: Yeah, almost three years. Three days away, October 19th. It's probably our lightest album in terms of "rock-ness." There's definitely rock, and it's definitely upbeat, but there aren't as many hard rock songs on it as previous albums. I think it's good. I think the songs are really strong. I think it stacks up with the rest of the albums we've made, so we feel good about it.

COLLIDE: I guess "lightest album" is not what I expected to hear, knowing that Butch Vig produced the album. His résumé is full of bigger rock albums.

LIND: Yeah, well, Butch was involved at a distance. He wasn't there everyday. He was sort of an outside perspective where we could send music to him and say, "Is this on the right track or are we crazy?" He was really supportive throughout the whole process and was really positive about what we were doing. He was there to keep us honest, in a way. When you're a band and you're in the studio all day, every day, you become isolated. You could be doing something that you think is really cool, but sometimes you need some pushback from the outside, and that's what Butch was able to give us.

COLLIDE: Are you playing a lot of the new songs on this tour?

LIND: We're not playing a lot of the new songs yet. We're playing one a night

pretty much.

COLLIDE: What has the reaction been?

LIND: Pretty good, I think. It's sort of hard to tell because when fans listen to new songs live they just kind of stare and listen. They don't have a whole lot of physical reaction because they're just trying to soak in the song for the first time. It definitely hasn't been negative, so that's good.

COLLIDE: Obviously music is a huge part of your personal and professional life. Spiritually, what value does music have for you?

LIND: In a lot of ways, I think I was born to do what I'm doing. It's very natural for me to do it. Not only playing music, but being in a band, being in a group of guys. We've been a band a long time, so it's a big part of who I am. It definitely shapes my life in a lot of ways. Especially the traveling has, I think, helped me gain a little bit more perspective about the world I live in. There's no stopping and starting as far as what I do as an occupation and who I am as a person—emotionally, spiritually, and in all ways—and so I don't like to say there's a distinction between that and what I do. I feel like I'm doing what I'm best at. Somehow it all makes sense.

COLLIDE: Tell me a little bit about your relationship with David Crowder.

LIND: I met David Crowder over email. He and I started emailing each other



back and forth and talking about music. He invited me to be a part of his record, *Illuminate*, and so I went to Waco for a few days and was in the studio with them. I just sort of gave whatever direction they wanted to take and they went with it. They're really talented, and he's a really interesting guy. We talk every once in a while. I talked to him just the other day because we were in Austin, but he was out of town. He's a really talented guy.

COLLIDE: I read a quote from you where you talk about being drawn to David Crowder Band because the music and the guys really stood out. For you, the sound and the authenticity seemed to differentiate them from a lot of other bands. Are there any other artists who fit that description for you, either in or out of the Christian world?

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LIND: Regardless of what a band is, or what kind of genre they play in, they have to do something musically that interests me. I have to feel like they're doing something new and fresh. Regardless of whether they're a Christian band or not, that's the way I judge what other people do. I can't really say that there's anyone else out there in the Christian music world whose music I like equal to David Crowder's. Not to say that there isn't someone out there I would like if I knew about it, but because of my own ignorance I can't think of anyone off the top of my head. I guess I don't really have my finger on the pulse very much. I couldn't point you to someone that I'm really digging in that world.

David has always been someone I've really enjoyed. I can listen to him, and then I listen to other bands that aren't in the Christian music

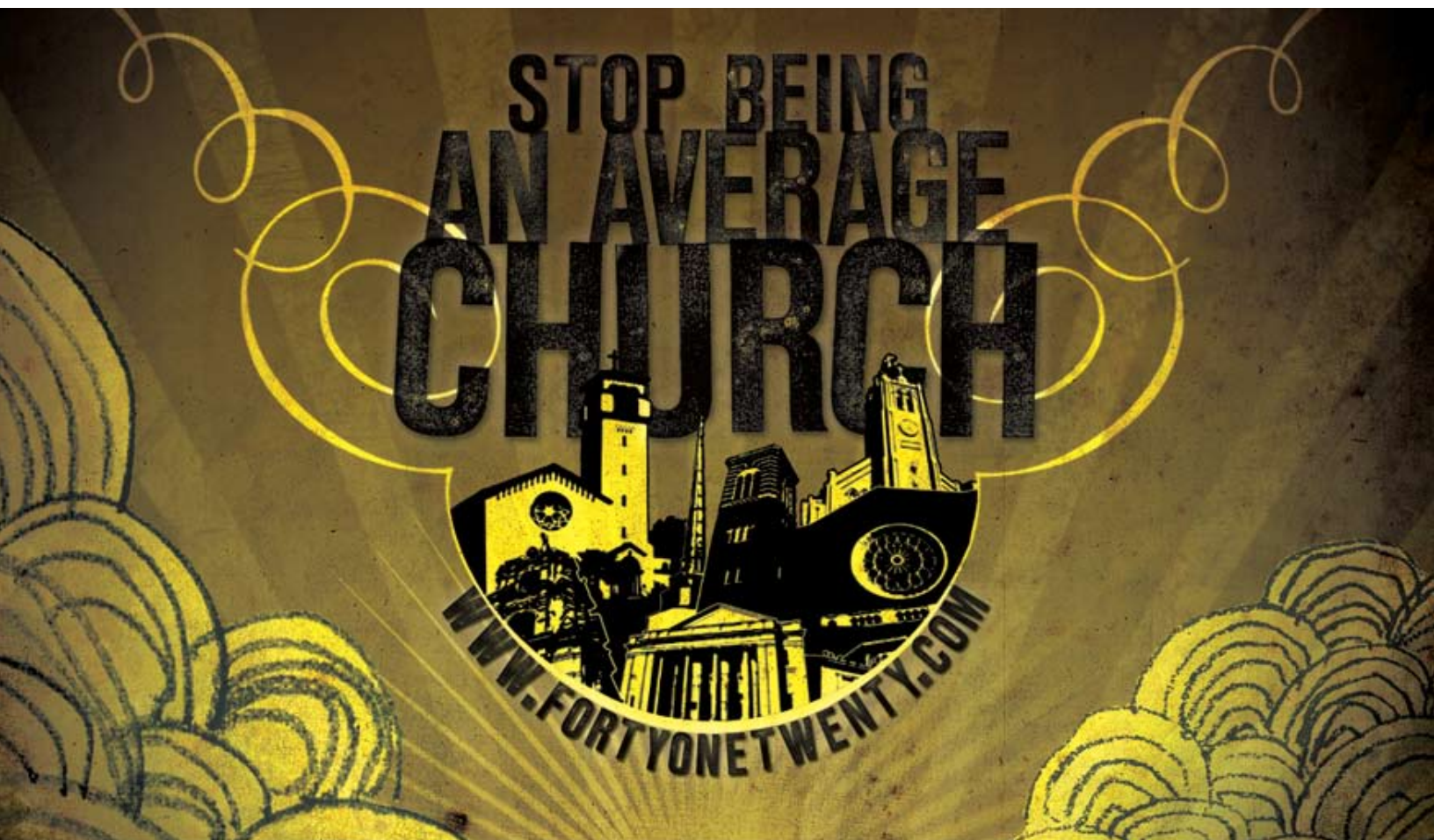
world, and I don't see a big discrepancy in terms of doing something new, doing something unique. There are a lot of bands that aren't in the Christian world that aren't doing something unique, so it depends on what they're after.

COLLIDE: David Crowder Band is obviously direct with redemptive themes in their music, is there anybody outside the church world in which you find music you connect to lyrically?

LIND: Oh yeah, tons of bands. It's sort of an endless list. Lyrically, musically, one of my all-time favorites is Elliot Smith, whom I've found to be brutally honest. He was just a really great songwriter, performer, and singer. I'd say he's up there. He influences me a lot. Obviously, U2 and Bono. A lot of his lyrics are the same way—really powerful and have an impact on me.

COLLIDE: Music is one of those areas where people especially like to draw the sacred/secular distinction. What do you make of that in your own life?

LIND: I think the reason that exists is commerce. Christian music exists because it's a business—



especially contemporary Christian music. It's a way for them to distinguish themselves from another part of their society, and in turn create for themselves a captive audience.

A really great example of that is that you can listen to Johnny Cash records that have brilliant Christian themes, and that are probably a little bit more brutally honest, and probably peer a little bit more into the darker side of life. But you won't find that in a Christian music store, because it's not considered Christian for some reason. Or, I could go down the list of amazing artists who the Christian world deems as not a part of their world. Even though their material and their insights are as powerful in terms of Christian imagery and Christian tradition, they're not anywhere in a Christian bookstore.

What that tells me is that Christian artists and the Christian music industry just want to distinguish themselves from the rest of society. They want to isolate themselves from the hang-ups that come with being a secular artist. What that means is that the standards are lower. Christian artists don't challenge themselves as much because they don't have to—they have a captive audience.

I feel like things are getting a little bit better, but I feel like that distinction is purely self-serving and it's purely for creating some kind of leverage in order to do better in selling records. That's my perspective on it. It's pretty silly to me.

COLLIDE: Has anyone ever suggested you sign on with a Christian band or become a Christian artist?

LIND: Not really. Not in any significant way. It's kind of stupid. It's like asking a banker to work for a Christian bank. It's really silly. It really is meaningless. That's the insular thinking that I think really harms the Church. It creates a world in which creativity is not really valued as much.

COLLIDE: There are boundaries established lyrically and musically.

LIND: Yeah, and it becomes really confusing if you're someone who is entrenched in the Christian bubble, and you start to think, "Oh wow, there are people out there who aren't Christians who are listening to a Third Day album." They think there are people out there who are convinced to believe because they're listening to that. I've even heard bands like Third Day say that they're a ministry, which they're not. They're a business. They're offering goods and services to Christian consumers. There is very little changing of minds

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going on. It's simply to create an avenue for people who are Christians, who are afraid of enjoying anything secular, to go to a show and hear music.

COLLIDE: I'm a big fan of the NOOMA series, and I remember seeing you in a NOOMA ad, watching one of their DVDs on the tour bus. You know Rob Bell, right?

LIND: I met Rob Bell through a friend. He was actually a Jimmy Eat World fan and we started corresponding, communicating, meeting up, and getting to know each other. I'm not really officially involved in what he's doing; I'm more of a friend.

I met Rob when he was starting to encounter a lot of different hurdles in terms of his church and starting to write a book. Putting something out there like a book that is going to be critiqued, there are a lot of similarities between what I go through as a musician and what he goes through as a pastor. Pastor is a much harder job, but there are some parallels. In that, there is a bond in terms of comparing our situations and how to react to certain things.

In a way, his role is highly creative. He's writing books, he's writing sermons. Every week he has to do something creative, coming up with something new. I think we really connect a lot on that level, in terms of the challenge that brings—the highs and lows of that. It's a cool friendship; we relate to each other in a lot of big ways.

COLLIDE: I haven't had a chance to read Shane Hipps' book yet, although I've read rave reviews and have seen some great quotes from him. What is the focus of the podcast you two are doing?

LIND: The podcast is called "Third Way Faith." I host it and Shane is more or less the "wisdom bringer." Shane and I have become pretty good friends as well, and relate in a lot of the same ways that Rob and I relate. Shane has a very valuable perspective when it comes to a lot of the things that your company does and that your magazine

deals with. It's asking the right questions about how media shapes us.

What does putting a video screen in our church really mean? Peeling away how things might look good on paper, but how there are unintended consequences to the decisions that churches make. Like when they decide to do a video venue, or whether they decide to use images, all those types of things. What Shane does is unpack, in a really useful way, what all those choices can mean, and giving someone a better understanding of how media affects people in the Church. Not just to ask questions, but to try to ask the right questions about taking a certain approach to church in terms of technology or media, and what consequences those choices will have.

COLLIDE: What is the significance of the term "Third Way"?

LIND: "Third Way" is kind of an echo of Mennonite tradition. Shane pastors a Mennonite church. I've started going to Shane's church as well and I've familiarized myself with it. I would say that you can't really pigeon hole the Mennonite tradition. It's not really conservative; it's not really liberal. The Mennonite tradition was born out of the Anabaptist stream of faith; in tradition it's not really Protestant, it's not really Catholic. It's something else. So that tradition is the odd one out, but it's a really unique tradition and I think that, in that light, Shane has a really good sermon on his website called "Third Way Faith," which really illuminates for people the history and tradition of Mennonites, the tradition and the uniqueness of it.

Perhaps the "third way" description is just as appropriate for Lind as it is for the Mennonites. After all, he's not a decadent, self-destructive rock star, nor is he a pious, conservative praise & worship drummer. Rather, he seems to be finding his own way—a third way—as an active, and very visible, participant in both the Church and culture. Ironically, he may never fit the preferred mold in either realm. ☐

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