

Telling stories through music

At a time when music is proving a powerful tool in coping with isolation, we meet the man who spent lockdown making an album

Artey Williams is cool. He has a neat, trendy beard, an ageless twinkle in his eye and a soft Merseyside accent – plus he plays 12-string guitar, something he shares with Jimi Hendrix, Brian May and David Bowie. Yet here is a man with a deep Christian faith, which has shaped his life, brought him to Dorset, and led to his latest musical venture.

In the summer of 2018 Artey, a retired surveyor, was living in Liverpool. He was an elder at the United Reformed Church in Crosby, and played in a band, but he had a feeling that life was becoming stagnant. “One day, feeling rather low, I had an audacious moment,” he says. “I was at home alone and I offered up a prayer, asking God what he wanted to do with me. Then my wife, Ally, came back and announced that we had to move – something had been triggered in her at the same time. I had my answer.”

Nine months later they moved into their new home in West Bay Road. While researching different areas for the next stage of their life, they had spent a week in Topsham, Devon, where someone suggested visiting Bridport. “We came here on market day,” says Artey. “In Bucky Doo Square there was a jazz musician – the Crooked Crooner

– playing the trumpet and singing. I just fell in love with the place.” They came back for another week to make sure, then the plan was set.

Not only did Artey and Ally have a new life in Dorset, but an exciting new project was also just around the corner. Artey started going to services at Bridport United Church, where he still worships, and through the church heard about a Methodist minister in Weymouth who was looking for a guitarist to play at the Tolpuddle Festival in 2019. Obviously Artey volunteered for the gig, and at the festival he met the Revd Dr Barbara Glasson, president of the Methodist Conference.

They had a quick chat, then later connected on Facebook and became friends. Artey read some of Barbara’s poetry and prayers, and they resonated with him so much that this year he offered to put them to music. He says what followed was a “whirlwind of composition” as he wrote eight new songs in just over three months. “I had released an album of original music before, but this was the first time I’d used existing words. The notes just tripped off my guitar.”

Because of Covid-19, he couldn’t record in a professional studio, so instead laid down the tracks at home and taught himself how to use Garage Band editing software to ‘tweak’ before sending the audio files to be put together. “It was all fairly straightforward, thank goodness,” he says. “To be honest it kept me sane during lockdown; it was a time of great focus and helped me deal with the isolation.”

On the album Artey sings melody and harmonies and plays guitar, while percussion and keyboards come courtesy of Bridport band The Gravity Drive. The music is a little bit folky, with catchy, accessible melodies. The title track, ‘Stories to tell’, is about three women: Susannah Wesley, Charles’s mother; Emma Pollard, the wife of a Methodist missionary who joined her husband in China then watched him die of typhoid; and Betsy Loveless, the wife of one of the Tolpuddle Martyrs. Other songs include ‘The carpet of my life’, written for the



Artey Williams

World Day of Prayer, and ‘Nobody told the spring’, about the coronavirus lockdown.

“The Methodist Church helped to make it happen by sponsoring some elements of the production process,” Artey says. “And we’ve sold 100 CDs so far, which is fantastic. I’m also excited to say that in the late summer I released one of the tracks, ‘Sister Moon’, as a single and it went straight in at number one in the UK Contemporary Christian Music Charts.”

So what’s next for Artey? “Barbara and I are planning to take the album on a live acoustic tour – Covid permitting, of course – and we’ve booked some March dates in Cheshire. And we already have six or seven songs for the next album – so watch this space!”

Stories to Tell on CD is £12.99 and is available online at www.arteywilliams.com/shop along with Artey’s first album, *The Dream of a Dream*.

