



RICH MULLINS



RAGAMUFFIN BAND

“An Ongoing Legacy”
“The Times-Mail” newspaper
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On September 19, 1997, a tragic automobile accident on Interstate 39 near Lostant, Illinois claimed the life of Contemporary Christian musician, author, and modern-day prophet, Rich Mullins.

As the world mourned the loss of this visionary man of faith - his legacy of forgiveness, acceptance, and unconditional love of Jesus continues to find new life in the musical missions of his back-up band, the Ragamuffins.

The unique gathering of accomplished and highly acclaimed musicians, currently comprised of Rick Elias, Jimmy Abegg, Mark Robertson, and Aaron Smith, were also Mullins friends and fellow travellers on his journey to know, love, and share Jesus.

“None of us were forced to be Ragamuffins to make a living,” Elias said. “We were and are Ragamuffins because we found a home with each other and with Rich. He gave us a place where we could be ourselves, where we were respected as artists, and where we could grow together in Christ.”

Mullins, a self-proclaimed ragamuffin, derived the band’s name from Brennan Manning’s book, “The Ragamuffin Gospel,” which exemplified his own belief in a Jesus that abandoned power, brought good news to the poor, and provided salvation for the broken, weak, and outcast.

Every song Mullins sang, every word he spoke, and every sentence he wrote revealed the seeking, restless, and often frustrated struggles of a man who hungered to listen and obey God's word, while simultaneously trying to silence his human appetite for sin.

After fifteen years of recording music, twelve Gospel Music Association Dove Awards, and numerous No.#1 hits, Mullins met with the Ragamuffins, his record label, and manager to discuss recording an album portraying a Jesus that challenges and agitates, yet heals and comforts.

"Rich demanded that we focus on Jesus," Robertson said, "and not just in terms of subject matter. He wanted this project to make us better, more faithful as a band and as individuals."

He originally conceived it to be a Ragamuffins album entitled "The Jesus Record," with all the band members receiving equal vocals.

"Rich was so unselfish," Abegg said. "It simply never occurred to him to view us as anything but partners in the process. We were peers, and because of that, everyone in the circle had an equal say and share. He simply wanted to empower us - to use his own platform to lift us up."

During a performance in a small Illinois church, Mullins made a crude boombox demo tape of songs he had selected for the album. Having co-written eight of ten selections, the demo reflected Mullins personal view of Jesus, his theology, and himself.

"Rich told me," Robertson said, "that this was the only one of his records that he felt had to be made. It was that important to him."

Mullins passed away one week before the album was to be professionally recorded.

Throughout the grieving process, the Ragamuffins found refuge in gathering together to pray, sing his songs, and share their favorite "Mullins Stories."

Myrrh Records vice-president Jim Chaffee and the Ragamuffins both agreed that "The Jesus Album," should still be made. Arrangements were also made for a portion of the proceeds to be donated to Mullins work with young artists on the Navajo reservations.

"We didn't want to exploit either his memory or these songs simply for sentiment or profit," Chaffee said. "We knew we needed to be wise and tender with this gift Rich had left us. More than any other project we were involved in, we knew that if we were to proceed, everything we did had to be grounded in Christ."

The Ragamuffins were given full creative freedom to record the songs themselves with Mullins closest musical friends - Amy Grant, Ashley Cleveland, Phil Keaggy, and Michael W. Smith.

“Being in the studio for this record,” Abegg said, “was one of the loneliest experiences of my life. I mean, we were all together. Everyone was there who needed to be. Except Rich.....I kept expecting him to walk through the door and pull up a chair.”

After six months in the recording studio, the completed two disc set includes the Ragamuffins version as well as an enhanced version of Mullins' original boombox vocals.

The loss of Rich Mullins is a story of tragedy and triumph for the Ragamuffins.

The tragedy was losing an exceptional vocalist, songwriter, generous mentor, gifted teacher, and gracious friend at the peak of his artistic passion.

The triumph lies in the ability of “The Jesus Record,” to mirror Mullins' goal of melodically soothing a troubled soul, while lending a timeless lyrical voice to his message of Christ.