



## Christian rock pioneer Norman fondly remembered

By David F. Dawes

LARRY NORMAN, a solid rock in the history of Christian music, passed away February 24 at age 60, in Salem, Oregon. He had been battling heart problems for several years.



Norman, who virtually invented 'Christian rock,' released more than 60 albums and was frequently cited as an inspiration by other musicians. His most influential work was 'The Trilogy,' consisting of *Only Visiting this Planet*, *So Long Ago the Garden* and *In Another Land*, all released between 1972 and 1976. Some of his more important songs were 'Why Should the Devil Have All the Good Music,' 'I Wish We'd All Been Ready,' 'I'm the Six O'clock News' and 'The Rock that Doesn't Roll.'

According to [Assist News](#), Norman was for several years "a permanent fixture on Hollywood Boulevard -- where, despite being a star with Capitol Records, he would spend his days and nights sharing one-on-one with the lost youth of Hollywood, about the love of Jesus Christ."

Assist also noted that Norman was "credited with inventing the 'One Way to Jesus' finger-pointing sign."

In a [statement](#) announcing his death, his brother Charles said: "We spent this past week laughing, singing and praying with him; and all the while, he had us taking notes on new song ideas and instructions on how to continue his ministry and art. Several of his friends got to come and visit with him in the last couple of weeks, and were a great source of help and friendship to Larry."

Just prior to his death, Norman dictated a message which read in part: "I feel like a prize in a box of crackerjacks, with God's hand reaching down to pick me up. I have been under medical care for months. My wounds are getting bigger. I have trouble breathing. I am ready to fly home . . . My plan is to be buried in a simple pine box with some flowers inside."

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Canadian musicians Michael and Donnie Gossett, founders of BC-based [Salvation Air Force](#), knew Norman for well over three decades. They considered him a mentor.

"I first met Larry in 1972 when I attended a musician's conference in Dallas," stated Donnie in a tribute on [his website](#). "After hearing one of Larry's entertaining and informative sessions, my brother contacted Larry to ask if he was interested in hearing my songs -- including a hard rock cover of Larry's own 'The Last Supper.' We then met Larry for about two hours, where we traded songs and ideas . . . Five months later, our band opened for Larry at his first concert in Vancouver."

Norman, he noted, "advised us on every aspect of the music business -- from stage attire, to answering questions with the press, to songwriting, and the presentation of our art to cross cultural and language barriers.

"Larry also enjoyed our sense of humour, and we spent many hours discussing and laughing over the peculiar balance of spiritual issues in a changing cultural environment."

His mentor, Gossett observed, "was a complex person who wrestled with complex issues and was unafraid to speak uncomfortable views -- but, along with that boldness, he sometimes made mistakes . . . Larry and I had more than one falling out over the years."

However, he added, "Larry taught me so many profound lessons . . . that his loss -- though anticipated for some time -- still has the sense of loss that one can never prepare for. Larry was one of the most intelligent, insightful, colourful, upsetting and fascinating people I met in my life."

Just prior to meeting Norman, Michael Gossett heard his *Upon this Rock* album. He recounts: "I had hoped that he was as radical as the record suggested, and in person he didn't disappoint. His hair was even longer, and he was very bold in his stage attitude . . .

"Mentally, he had a brilliant mind, like a steel trap -- and when he was on his game, he was very difficult to argue with."

Norman was also "fun, playful, kind, gentle and warm. He really was a servant in his attitude, and generous to a fault. When he wanted to, this guy went out of his way to encourage and support others."

February 28/2008



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I was really sorry to hear of Larry's passing away. He was, along with Randy Stonehill, the first "Christian rock" artist I listened to back in 1983 when the Lord called me out of darkness and into his light and I threw out 52 of my albums and bought Christian music for the first time. The Lord showed me what Larry was doing and it has stuck to me until this day

and I thank God for his witness, his boldness. I only wish I had met him while he was on this planet. Keep rockin' in Heaven, Larry, and say one for us!!

Pete Mason  
www.myztery.net  
#1 **Pete Mason** - 03/01/2008 - 07:59

I'd heard Larry's music early in the 1970's. I'd joined the band "Commissioned Brotherhood" for a summer 1974 tour which took us to Victoria, Vancouver island and Vancouver, BC and culminated in my first outdoor concert in Surrey, BC, headlined by Larry and the Salvation Air Force. There I met Larry, and, being the starstruck young musician and baby christian that I was, I sought Larry out after the concert, in the dark near a tour bus to get his autograph. He politely but firmly told me that he never gave autographs. I was crushed. It took me many years to mature in Christ and to understand where he was coming from. Years later I visited his family home in San Jose whose address I got from an album cover in order to get some materials advertised on its back cover. I saw his younger brother mowing the front lawn thinking how similar he looked to his brother, except with far shorter hair. I guess I was still upset with Larry for not giving me his autograph when I asked his father if a guy like me could jam with Larry. His father told me that he recorded strictly with professional musicians and didn't just jam with just anybody. I was crushed once again. Many years later now, I am far more mindful of the currents flowing in the body of Christ and how I will see Larry again, under far more favorable circumstances. I pray that he will forgive my eccentricities and that I have learned even more about my own prideful ways. Rest in the arms of Jesus, friend Larry. I'll see you soon.

#2 **Marlon Ragsdale** - 03/01/2008 - 18:22

It is weird to hear that Larry has passed away. When I heard about it today I felt a great pain and loss in my heart. I know we have all been waiting for this possibility for years now. It's different when it actually happens.

Larry was the first christian concert that I ever went to in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada in 1979 (I still have the concert stub). But it wasn't til 1990 that God brought me to a breaking point and I cried out for more of Him and less of the dead religion that I grew up in. I bumped back into a "In Another Land" record and cried for a week listening to the words that told me over and over "Jesus loves me".

I will pray that the anointing that God gave Larry to "cut through the religious crap and tell a clear gospel message" will be passed on to someone else who can continue letting the world know that it's really just all about Jesus.

I love you Larry and will miss you. I hope you are in front of the Father right now, filled with His awe and holiness and are singing your songs to the King Himself.

We will all miss you very much.

Mark Giesbrecht  
Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada  
#3 **Mark Giesbrecht** - 03/02/2008 - 14:52

i worked and lived with Larry in early 90's. there is no way to describe the loss and the freedom all at the same time.  
brander mcdonald  
Chilliwack BC  
#4 **brander mcdonald** - 03/03/2008 - 08:52

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