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B: Hi, I'm Brandon Nappi.

H: Hi, I'm Hannah Black.

B: And we're your hosts on The Leader's Way, an audio pilgrimage from Berkeley Divinity School, the Episcopal Seminary at Yale University.

H: On this journey, we reflect on what matters most in life as we talk about all things spirituality, innovation, leadership, and transformation.

H: Tell me about why you're familiar with Craig Minowa. Tell me about who is Craig Minowa; what do we have coming for our listeners?

B: Oh, this is a really exciting conversation for me personally. So Craig Minowa is founder, I think frontman is how the music industry might describe it, although he's really collaborative and I'm sure wouldn't use that word. But, frontman for the band Cloud Cult, a Minnesota-based indie rock band. And they write music at the intersection of spirituality and social change and growth and transformation and psychology and theology. If there were a house band in the Nappi house, it would be Cloud Cult. And so Cloud Cult is, full disclosure, my wife's very favorite band. It's among my favorite bands, but she is a Cloud Cult devotee. And so for Christmas last year, I got her tickets to her first Cloud Cult concert and we...

H: That's so fun!

B: We rocked. It was quite moving. You know, they got us through the pandemic amid all the isolation and the despair. And so, music of hope was so sacred and necessary for us.

H: Yeah, that's so important. One of the things I'm loving about the way this show is developing as we record episode after episode is that hope is a focus for us. You know, we're talking to all kinds of leaders and people who are deeply thinking about the world. It's really easy to be drawn into temptation to despair, I think. And I love that this is another form of hope in the world. Music.

B: Absolutely. And if I could make a confession, I am really fussy when it comes to music.

H; You're special special.

B: Yeah, I'm special, special. I tend to like historical, older music for worship. My sweet spot is kind of like the English choral music tradition. That's sort of my home base. But I would not, for

example, very easily put on any form of Christian contemporary music. Usually, it makes my skin crawl. And I wish it wasn't the case. And I'm a little envious of folks who have this deep repertoire of contemporary Christian music that uplifts them and inspires them. And so, when I came to Cloud Cult, I was so excited because I felt like they sang in a kind of vernacular and in a kind of form that just felt really organic and natural for me. So when I hear this music, I want to be hopeful. I want to rejoice. It feels like a good fit for me. So to have this conversation is just really cool and a great blessing.

H: Love it. Love it.

B: How about you? How was your music, your spiritual and Christian musical taste?

H: Well, so listeners will know by now that I grew up in a non-denom megachurch. So that was a lot of like Hillsong-y type things, but also, because it was a megachurch. It had its own internal rock stars. That was very much a thing. And then in college, when I was at Biola, I began worshipping in liturgical spaces. And I think because I was studying theology day in and day out, I really developed a love for what you're describing, like older hymns, because they're just chock full of theology. And I do have to say, like, I enjoy a good, "We're at camp, the guitar is out, we're like feeling it" kind of music, but that hasn't been my church experience now for 10 years. And one thing that frustrates me about contemporary worship music a lot is, it feels like there's a theological anemia sometimes. I've been growing, especially, actually, because I've become friends with one of our professors here at Yale Divinity School named Blenda, who is an ethnomusicologist who studies contemporary Christian worship music. So we'll have to have her on. We need Blenda to convince us of the value of contemporary worship music.

B: Oh, you know, and I ... at least for me, I don't so much need to be convinced. I love that there are people out there who enjoy this music. I'm just not one of them, and that's okay!

H: I'm a little bit Grinchy about it, I have to say. A little,

B: Yeah, a little ... the Grinch is still with us, the theological Grinch. It's an honor, the theological Grinch, coming out in you. Let me also say that the theological anemia in some contemporary Christian music also extends musically to guitar. And maybe it would feel differently if at least some of the music I heard had really skilled guitar players. But what I'm accustomed to is the contemporary worship band shows up and ...

H: it's three chords over and over and over.

B: It's three chords and not the truth.

H: The worst of both worlds.

B: Anyway ... Here's what I want to say. This conversation is the opposite of all of this grumbling. For me anyway, music in service to the divine, leading people to deep healing,

transformation, conversion, in a way that large numbers of people I think can understand. The vernacular and the poetry that Craig Minowa offers to the world is, I think, really both firmly rooted in a Christian vernacular and completely accessible. It's catholic with a small c, and universal in a way that I think makes him just a wonderful leader. It inspires me to think about my own language and how I teach both within the church and outside the church as well.

H: Yeah. And, well, I think as theologians, priests, preachers, lay leaders, what have you, there's a lot to be learned from music and even just to be enjoyed with music when it comes to things like spiritual transformation, because music is really good at what sometimes theology is really bad at, which is ... involving more than just the brain thoughts in spirituality.

B: Oh, amen. Well, I hope this can be a full-body experience, listening to this conversation.

B: Oh gosh. Well, I mean, Craig, thank you for being so gracious and making time for us. I want to share one of my most powerful memories and experiences of your music, and that was just after the end of the pandemic, when Cloud Cult started touring again, your music for us was almost like daily medicine in those super heavy, super isolating days of Covid. You were actually one of the first live events that we went to, that like, we were around other humans, and we were pretty cautious, but we were like, "Cloud Cult's in town, we're going to go," and it was profoundly connecting for us as a community. And then what you did on stage ... I'm still not sure that I have words for it, but it felt like church. and ummm, the best of church.

I wonder if you could just talk a little bit, big-picture about your spiritual roots, and at the highest level, how do you understand what's happening in your music, especially live, if some kind of participation in the transcendent is how I would name it, but ... do you see it that way? How do you make sense of this incredible thing that happens when you come together and make music with other humans?

Craig: Well, I do definitely see music as a whole, as this really special, magical gift that we humans have. If you look back historically to even the very earliest days of where the hunter-gatherer versions of us are gathering together in little tribes and starting to stand together? There are theories that we as humans actually *sang*, that we were musical before we even spoke. So when we gathered together in villages with each other, music was a centerpiece. It was something where there would be festivities planned around music, and the music was specifically bringing the people together and helping them connect with each other, helping them connect with big-picture things, the deities and the natural world. I think that there's something deeply embedded in our genetic code with music that naturally allows us to use it as a tool to connect to something much bigger than us. And so, for myself, ever since I was really young and very thankful to be raised in a house where the piano was the centerpiece, my mom played piano for church. So for us kids, having that constant interaction with the creation of music there was a huge gift. But for me personally, it was probably in my teenage years when I was really starting to struggle emotionally and spiritually, that I started realizing that music had something much deeper to provide to me. And specifically, the music composition process started to become a doorway into not only an emotional expression, but a spiritual expression that I couldn't do with any other language other than the language of music.

In that sense, I do feel like for the Cloud Cult music and for the performances in general, I feel like there's a much bigger opportunity than just going out to entertain or just going out to make a song for radio play. Anytime we're writing, or anytime we're going to stage is an opportunity to use that language of music, and altogether use it to try and connect to things that are bigger than us.

B: I remember being a kid in church, and I grew up Roman Catholic and going to church was just sort of a regular rhythm. I don't know that we were terribly devout. There wasn't a lot of prayer happening. There certainly wasn't Bible study happening. And it was when I started singing in the choir that, "Oh, the search for God can be really fun." And so I think what I appreciate about the moments in your concert where I was most sort of swept away were these moments of pure delight. I think for so many people, certainly for so many kids, faith communities can be dull and boring and—right?—the thing that you have to do. And so music has this real power to open up something else, and delight for me is one of I know for so many of the folks who listen and follow your music. It's just pure delight. And you have this capacity to go from the pit of despair to utter delight. Like I'm thinking of one way out of a hole. I mean, you just start with the title of the song. You start with the early parts of really investigating what it means to feel like you're in a hole.

Which way do I go?

Which way do I go?

There's only one way out of a hole.

Giddy-up, let's go.

B: And then by the end, it's like this sort of anthemic celebration.

Which way do I go?

There's only one way out of a hole.

B: So how does songwriting work for you in that way? I mean, do you set out to sort of encompass all of human experience? Or, how do these songs sort of evolve and grow out of your heart and out of your guitar?

C: Oh, I appreciate the kind words about the performance. I definitely feel honored by the audiences that we have now. I think that there's a lot of people that are coming with a lot of intention and a lot of feelings to work through. And so, you know, we're all kind of doing that work together. And I think on a deeper level, we're all recognizing that we're leaning on each other. As far as the writing process for me, again, going back to the teen years, I struggled with a lot of bullying and I had a lot of depression and music over and over in my life has literally been a lifesaver for me. It's an absolutely essential tool in my medicine cabinet. So when I think

about any big life transitions that I have, and this can be honestly for me several days a week, where I have like a really deep transcendental personal struggles that I need to harness. For me to be able to go to a quiet spot with a guitar or piano or something like that and try to commune with something deeper, it's sort of like a prayer process for me in a really general and ambiguous kind of way. I don't have a very exact or specific faith that I follow or that we sing about. We try to keep it as general as possible. But I think what you're speaking to is that human experience that we all have. We're all traveling through a roller coaster of emotions, and this living experience is so dramatically dynamic that most of us try and push down and keep quiet and put on the good face. So far as the songwriting process that I'm doing, I'm just trying to be authentic with the feelings that I think that we all have. And we all go to those difficult places at three o'clock in the morning, when we're staring at the ceiling and wondering about this anxiety, or this fear, or this shadow from childhood, or this thing that's on the horizon that we've got to face. For me, the songwriting process is very much that three-in-the-morning, facing the shadows and trying to figure out how you're going to be ready when the sun comes up by the end of the song.

H: It sounds to me like not only music, but the songwriting process, is deeply spiritual and something that transcends the finitude of what words could do alone. Do you think when you're writing your music, are you doing it for an audience or is it really for yourself? And do you consider yourself a spiritual leader?

C: I have struggled in the past with times where the music critics will come up in my head, and I wonder, "Is this song the one that will get radio spins?" I had put that in a coffin pretty early on because it really felt like it contaminated the whole process. I feel like the music industry as a whole is pretty saturated and dependent on the inflation of ego. So even the big music stars that we look at, there's this persona that's built. And that persona, going from stage or interviews or in the music itself, is an ego in itself. I've struggled with finding that balance of the music industry while I'm trying to do something that's really sacred that requires *loss* of ego. So the songwriting process is very dependent on me not only quieting the music critics or quieting the wondering what our listeners will think of a particular song, but quieting myself. The more I'm jibber-jabbering up here in the frontal lobe, the more I ruin the entire song. The more I can go into the songwriting process with a meditation, some kind of way of slipping out of myself as much as I can and trying to feel the bigger picture around me as much as I can, the more I feel like I'm not concerned about what anybody else is going to think because I feel like I'm not speaking from something where I'm going to take it personal if somebody has issue with it. The same thing holds true for stage. One of the biggest issues on stage is I am a very introverted and shy person. So going onto a stage night after night is not in my wheelhouse at all.

For me, it's a ceremony of recognizing when I'm feeling all sorts of anxiety that I am too ego-loaded. That's my ego being afraid of what people are going to think of me. In order to treat the evening how I feel like it should be treated, that means not having ego and trying to disappear into the ceremony of creating art and energy together, which again I think is as much the audience as it is the band.

So to circle back to answer your question, I think there's a lot of work in the artistic process for a lot of artists out there that involves setting yourself aside. Part of that is not caring

what anybody else thinks. Part of that is not labeling yourself as something like a spiritual leader because boy, the minute you do that then I might as well hang up the guitar. As labelless as possible is good.

H: So then what's it like when people connect with this deeply personal art that you've created?

C: I feel incredibly honored. I feel like it's as much them. There's something to be said about the different things that we look for in life that bring out our hearts, that bring out our souls, that bring out our desire for a connection to something bigger. And for everybody, that's very subjective. There's nothing inherent about what I'm creating that's a magic trick. It just happens to be that there already is this deep beauty and all these people out there and they're finding their own beauty. And I'm just lucky enough that maybe the music just created something in their head that allowed them to see their own beauty. It has nothing to do with me or the music itself.

H: I was thinking about this last night as I was listening to some of your music. I was thinking there's not a lot of rock music that I would describe as beautiful first and foremost, but that the word beauty comes to mind when I listen to your music. And that's something that as a society, we don't value, I think, as much as we should. And so when you give people an opportunity to experience actual beauty, which is outside of all of us, that's really profound.

C: I definitely agree with you. There seems to be a key to the bigger realms that is in beauty and more specifically awe.

H: Yes.

C: To be in a spot of recognizing how gorgeous this exact moment is. And sometimes that can be very difficult and sometimes it can be a little bit easier. But the more we all facilitate that ongoing process of feeling awe in our world, the more alive we all are. And I think in that sense, the more we're all being whatever we're supposed to be.

B: I want to circle back to how you were naming working with your own ego on stage or even just generally in music, because this is precisely what we were talking about with some of our seminarians last week. Right? Because we're training seminarians to be priests, to serve others, to be spiritual and religious leaders in the world. We were having a really intense conversation about the public nature of ministry. For most of our seminarians, it will be on a much smaller stage than the one that you step out on. But public nonetheless and what it means to be vulnerable, authentic, and to be literally growing and to have your spiritual practice be in view constantly. When you succeed, whatever success looks like, it's in front of people. But whenever you fail or are imperfect in any way, in the way that all of us humans are imperfect, it's in full view. And we were talking about just the importance of various spiritual practices to support doing this, because it's not normal, it's not natural in some ways. And so I wonder what is renewing to your soul? What's medicine for you so that you can stand up, put the ego aside, and do this work in front of folks? I wonder, as I know, our seminarians will be listening to you and wanting to know, like, how do you do that? Because it's terrifying.

C: Hmm. I think that probably is such a unique thing for every person. For me, it's a deep connection to the natural world. So when we're not touring, I've chosen a lifestyle that is deeply embedded in nature. The recording studio that I'm in most of the time is a little tiny home that's right by a creek and right by some woods that are not accessible to anyone. So when I'm there, it's me and the woods.

H: And beauty.

C: And beauty, yes. And it is very difficult. There's a reason, I think, that when we look at the analogues of poetry that humans have made going back through time, and it's so often rooted in this natural experience of being out in nature. It's hard to be out there and not recognize how incredibly miraculous this whole thing is. And to see all these other organisms that are going through their own struggles and their own growth curves. This time of year, for example, I can go out in those trees and I can be feeling my own loss that has me in an ego center. And once I get out there and I'm feeling all these trees and recognizing that year after year they're taking these hard-fought leaves, this huge, beautiful canopy and just letting go, and they're having to let go year after year and they're headed into a season of being frozen.

And the whole journey of all these hundreds of thousands of organisms out there in that little plot of woods reminds me that we're all going through this together and that there's nothing that needs to keep me completely grounded in this central ego. That is an island. And the more time I spend on that island of ego, whether that's an anxiety or lack of vulnerability or self-pity, the more I spend on that island, the more I'm not connected to the big picture stuff. And the whole reason I'm in the music industry is because I want to be connected to big-picture stuff in my career.

So I would think for what you were talking about as far as preparing these various career pursuits, the reason that you're choosing this career is because you have a hunger for big-picture things, and the thing that's going to cut you off from that feeding is being trapped in that little self-centered spot. And I think we as a culture have come to equate ego with somebody who's cocky or really into themselves. It took me a really long time to realize and to admit that I had a lot of ego because I had so much self-pity and anxiety and always feeling like, "Poor me," or, "This audience is going to make fun of me," or all that negative self-talk is also ego. So there's been a steep growth curve for me and listening to the negative talk and saying, "Well, that's ego too, and you're going to quiet down now."

B: It's all letting go at the end of the day. It's striking to me having been a sort of hobbyist student of many different world religions and spiritual traditions and each have their own way of articulating this reality. In Christianity, I'm thinking the word we use in theology often is "kenosis," this emptying idea, right? Richard Rohr over and over, talking about letting go; the 12-step tradition talking about letting go; you know, various Buddhist paths. If it's not letting go, then it's at the very least letting it be, that this thing does not have to dominate. It does not have to be my primary operating system. And how often our first inclination is to fight the ego and to go to war and yet the surrender is really the only thing that will ultimately bring freedom, right?

C: That is totally true, and I love that you brought up kenosis because that is such a powerful tool. Actually the last album that you were talking about at the beginning of the interview, the Metamorphosis album, I considered naming it Keinosis at the beginning. Yeah. The only reason I changed it is just because I really try and be open to as many worldviews as possible, and I was concerned that it might bring it too specifically to one worldview.

But the kenosis concept really is deeply marinated in pretty much every worldview. The summary of the calling for that has become so profound in my personal transition in the last couple of years and inherently has so much pain to it, while at the same time allowing in so much new joy. The letting go process, whether that's the ego or holding on to things in our lives, that letting go process at the same time is an opening up that allows in all of this awe and wonder and beauty, but also allows in so much more pain. We're opening up our nervous centers, we're opening up everything that we were born to be alive with, and so much of our culture is spent hiding from that and distracting from that and maintaining that careful little shell around us that protects us. But I think the more we can make ourselves vulnerable, the more we can open ourselves up to the reality of, "You know what, this living thing is going to hurt like hell but it's also going to be so beautiful." And if you shut down that hurt, you're also shutting down the window that allows in the appreciation of that beauty. That's what we're here for.

H: Yeah, and love I think. I worry about a conversation about kenosis, because there's a very fraught conversation in feminist theology about kenosis. But I think the key takeaway is that kenosis and vulnerability aren't to become less of yourself or to leave yourself aside completely. Maybe leave the ego aside, sure. But the opening up to love, beauty, experiences of awe, experiences of hurt after you've loved or been loved, it's about becoming more yourself rather than leaving yourself aside being a doormat or something like that.

C: Yeah, I think that that process can sort of be summed up in the moment that you're listening to music or the moment that you're looking at a beautiful piece of art. You lose yourself in it. It's not a negative thing to step outside of that sense of self or a little bit to experience something bigger.

B: I'm sensitive to this feminist critique, Hannah, and I'm glad you brought it up because ultimately I think understood in a really kind of holistic, healthy way, the surrender is to the divine image living and breathing in us. It brings freedom. And in the absence of surrendering to the divine, our culture teaches us to surrender to capitalism and its acquisition and its materialism that becomes the operating system. Like we are steeped in surrendering to the acquisition of stuff. And so it's almost ... I wonder if it's a redirection of what we're surrendering to. Whether it's an explicit critique, Craig, or certainly an implicit critique throughout your music of capitalism. There is some real teeth in what you're calling us to. It's not just a sort of let's all feel good and be together, but there is a kind of invitation to like reforming your life, transforming your life in a way that's both gentle, but has some real substance. Can you talk about the kind of, I don't know, shifts or growth or evolution you hope people might make in their lives, given the kind of

culture we're marinating in?

C: Yeah, I feel very hopeful. I think human beings were built with a toolkit that is so much beyond what we're utilizing, and that we are on a potential threshold of grabbing onto a new stage in evolution that is on a spiritual level, however you want to define that, versus a physiological level. And that is ushered in with the information age and industrial age and all of that. We've got so much transition and so much change happening within our species right now. And we're also at a point where there's multiple pathways where this can go.

Obviously, if we're talking environmental or geopolitical or whatever the situation is, I am a fierce believer in optimism that is rooted in reality. So the Pollyanna aspect of "Let's all be hopeful and put flowers in our hair and that it's all going to be fine," that can only come into fruition if we first go to all the dark places. I believe that if we're going to make this next step and the growth of the human species, that we've got to learn to go really far into some really difficult places. The way our culture is changing right now is allowing us to concentrate that process if we choose that.

So for example, just in a social media stream, let's say you're a TikToker, there's multiple places that can go where you're getting fed a minute of something quickly, quickly. It can be just pure junk food, or it's going to feed you what you watch. So if you're watching things that are positive affirmations or tools for how to build your psyche or your spiritual self better, then when you tune into TikTok, you're going to get a blast of concentrated information that you can then choose to take in and really work on that adventure of growth in yourself. And I feel like that with the music opportunity right now, too, that as a band, we're not the kind of music that would necessarily, you know, that you'd go and ... I mean, we've done fun festivals and things like that, but we're not necessarily fun, kind of bluegrass-y background music or, you know, things that people might really enjoy at a fun gathering, you know? We kind of require people to go into difficult places. Yeah. And so the ride can be a little, a little ... unique and it's not everybody's choice. But because of the technology, because of where we're at, at this space in time, we're able to have an audience that's global, even without going anywhere. And so just all these little types of things are opening the doorway for a spiritual transformation that I don't think we had access to in earlier times.

H: Actually, this might be a good moment to ask you for our listeners who haven't listened to Cloud Cult before, could you describe your music and maybe even recommend a song that a listener should listen to? And a little bit about that.

C: Sure. It transforms a lot with individual albums and over the anthology of albums, too. My favorite albums growing up were albums that were really diverse in genres. Artists where you can put on an album and you felt like you were listening to a mix on the radio. All the different genres, there's so many wonderful things to enjoy in each of those. So I never really wanted to get painted in that corner with one specific genre.

H: And really, the worst is when you listen to an album and every song sounds exactly the same.

C: Yeah, it starts turning into white noise. Yeah, yeah, definitely. So I think like, you know, Beck's first album where one song is super folky and then one song is like this bloody, in-your-face punk rock thing, and one other thing is hip hop. I know it's just all over the place. It was really inspiring for me to listen to it, and think, you don't have to pick any one of these— you can do it all. Musically speaking, yeah, we could ... there can be spots of where it's considered indie rock; there's spots of where it's considered chamber music even, because we've got cello and violin and brass instruments.

H: I love that. I love that.

B: Yeah, yeah, there's so many possibilities with all the wonderful genres that humans have come up with over time. It gets folky, it's kind of all over the place. But as a whole, the goal is to construct an album that has a storyline and emotional curve that brings you down into the difficult places, and then pulls you back up and then leaves you in a spot of, okay, I'm ready for my day. Let's go.

B: You know, when I talk about Cloud Cult and I'm wanting to introduce folks to your music, which I feel like is my own personal mission in life, I love starting folks with “You're the Only Thing in Your Way.”

(music) You are the wind, the flood and the flame  
Nothing here can get in your way  
You've come too far to care what they say  
Now you're the only thing in your way

B: Or “No One Said it Would Be Easy,” because I tend to be talking to folks who, like us, you know, are really committed to transformation and growth, and often find that they're the primary stumbling blocks in their own lives—as I am.

(music) And when it all comes crushing down, you try to understand your meaning  
No one said it would be easy. This living, it aint easy  
You were sewn together with a tapestry of molecules

B: When I think about those two songs, really sort of focused on the journey of growth and transformation, and I think almost all of your albums have been focused generally in that direction, when you look back kind of on a meta-perspective, do you notice any shifts in terms of how you talk about growth and how you talk about transformation over the years? As you become a father; as you've grown and been on your own journey? Do you speak differently about the journey of growth at this point in life than you did like 10 years ago?

C: Yeah, I think each chapter in life had its own kind of focal place for what was happening with the growth at that time. So there are some early albums before it was my income source that were inspired by the loss of our son. We lost a two-year-old, and I went into some really heavy,

dark grieving spaces. I lived alone in this little farmhouse and just wrote songs incessantly for a year just to try and feel closer to him. There was no desire to release it or turn it into anything. I just needed to use the music to grieve.

H: Catharsis.

C: Yeah. And it also felt like with the music process and our ancestors did this too, but using music to try and connect to those that have gone before us, there's a really rich history of different types of music that humans have made to try and connect to those that we are grieving the loss of. My growth phase at that time was going through that grieving process and those albums reflect that grief, catching up to the Metamorphosis album for me. I had over the years been very dependent on alcohol; the Metamorphosis process was where I began to choose sobriety for myself. And that was one of those spots that was really hard for me to be honest. You're talking earlier about vulnerability. You know, the ego in me didn't want to confess to the fact that I've had this problem for a long time. And every night, I have an excuse for why I'm going to have beverages, and I'm going to have too many beverages. And I'm going to have reasons in the morning when I wake up why that is not considered alcoholism, or why I'm not as bad as such and such a person. And therefore I don't have a problem. It's just part of my music, that's part of this business or whatever, you know, always having an excuse for that. But the growth phase for me at that time was sobriety, and all of the inner journey and the process of losing old shells of myself in order to become a new self was a lot more difficult than I anticipated. And in a lot of ways, a whole album came out of that. So each phase in life, just like all of us, we are inspired by different needs for change and growth in ourselves.

B: There have been so many shifts in the music industry over the last generation or two. And just as sort of a casual observer, sort of of the economics of music, you know, I presume that an artist at one point in history would make most of their money from CD sales or, you know, maybe a generation ago from downloads. And this scene has radically shifted. And I know you've been really trying to make some intentional choices around family. And out of this has come this really powerful and beautiful Patreon community that we've been a part of for the last couple years. And it's really this connected, ragtag group of folks who not only love your music, but are also on a kind of journey themselves spiritually. I wonder if you could just talk about the shifting dynamics of economics in music and how you've really tried to sort of stay true to your own values, honor your family, but still be creative, still be connected to other people while you can't necessarily be on the road and touring 300 days out of the year. What's that like for you?

C: Yeah, the industry is sort of a symptom of everything that's on such a crash course of change. The industry itself has changed quite dramatically. In fact, five years ago, I thought I was going to need to wrap up the whole Cloud Cult thing just because we have four kids; three are biological, but at the time, five years ago, we had the three and touring—I don't want to be away from my kids that much. And so my priorities are definitely to first and foremost, to be a very present father. So I was really struggling with how the income stream was going to be able to continue if I cut back on touring, especially given that CD sales are gone. And streaming pays roughly one one hundredth of a penny every time you listen to something. So there's really not much revenue in there. I don't think most people realize that that's staggering.

B: I didn't realize it was I knew it was minuscule. I didn't realize it was that minuscule. Wow.

C: Yes, Spotify just announced yesterday that they want to increase their pay next year and that will turn out to be five cents per 200 listens. So it's not a great revenue stream. But having said that the beauty of the changing music industry did bring Patreon. I've wanted more from the music creation process. So making an album would be a very personal growth journey. And putting it out there, there would be some feedback and some exchange with fans, you know, with email or letters or whatever, where I would kind of learn a little bit about what their growth journey was. Some reciprocation of that, of that energy back and forth, even having songs that were inspired by the journey of different individual supporters that were sharing their personal stories with me.

Then, going out and doing these shows was also a really separate kind of thing where the audience is there, there might be a few people that come up afterwards and share their personal stories. But that was about as close of a connect I could get to that mutual relationship with the listener. And I was finding back then when I was meeting people at shows, that there's just so many beautiful people out there. I was getting so inspired by humanity and recognizing that there's so much potential if we can let down those walls and be really authentic and open with each other. We're standing next to a stranger on a bus that you're having a disconnect with. But if they were able to really open up in front of you, you'd find out how beautifully human they are. And I was finding that with these different supporters, but it wasn't until Patreon where there's a realization of this new technology can allow me to continue to create music but have this really close relationship with the supporters where I've made so many friends, like I would call them close friends. They came as supporters, but we bounce ideas back off each other. And they're so full of wisdom and advice and life experience that there's this community there with the music that I was talking about at the beginning of this of where we gathered around in our village or our tribe as a small group and use the music as a conduit to start a bigger conversation with each other.

I'm the kind of person that if I go to a party, like a big party, I'm super overstimulated and uncomfortable and I don't like being there. And I'll look for like some quiet side room that I can get to. And I'll get to this quiet side room where there's like four or five people who have looked for the same thing.

H: That's a sweet spot.

C: Yeah. And they're the ones that are sitting there, and they want to talk about how big the universe is, or how hard their day was, or –real things, you know, and sit there. And that's my favorite part of the party. And I feel like that analogy applies to Patreon and the Cloud Cult music journey of these are the people at the little quiet room on the side, and we're all hanging out and talking meaningful things. And at the same time, they're allowing me to create more than I've ever created because I don't have to think about scheduling a big wide tour right now. I can just think about ... I'm gonna have a song this week. I'm gonna have another one. I'm gonna have another one. I mean, I'm literally going to get off of this interview and continue working on a brand new song I just started yesterday that will go to Patreon at the end of the day today.

H: That is so exciting.

C: Yeah, yes, it's such a beautiful process. And I hope to make that symbiotic and continue to grow. And that's, again, just a small example of where human technology and human advancement is offering opportunities for spiritual growth in totally new ways.

H: I have like two burning final questions for you and I can't decide between them. So I'm just gonna ... I think it dovetails from what you're already talking about. So I'll ask you both. What are you working on right now? And is there anything that's giving you hope that you would want to share with us?

C: Yes. I feel like I started a journey of change in life a few years ago that ... the albums are all very personal in that sense. And that's why the last one was called Metamorphosis. But I don't feel like that's changed. I feel like as I open the doorway to change, it just keeps accelerating. And it's like life is saying, "How much can you handle?" You know, both good and bad. And I and I would imagine that for everybody out there, it's like we open open the doorway to possible growth and life will put it in there. The more we attach on to old ideas, the more we're kind of stuck in that way of being. So I'm on a growth journey right now that it's incredibly painful, but incredibly satisfying. And I would say if there's hope, there's hope in the sense that you can go through great pain and great loss and come out feeling even bigger things instead of coming out feeling cynicism or pessimistic.

I had this spot a few months ago, in June, where I felt like a dark night of the soul. And the weight of the world and all of the struggles had caught up to me. And I had two nights where I just sat up all night. And I felt like Anakin Skywalker in that Star Wars scene where he goes to the dark side. I felt that in me. And I couldn't ... I was like, I am feeling the darkest things. I was so sad to feel like I was losing myself and my hope and my faith in humanity. And I sat there for a while. And then I felt something somewhere deep down started coming up and came up with the sunrise. And I felt a connection. You know, we talk about this in all the different religious texts of this connection to this infinite, eternal, boundless, unconditional love; the source underneath and in and through everything. And I felt it there. I felt it keeping me afloat. And I can't put name on it, feeling like, "Oh, there you are." But to get to that foundation, I had to go through so much darkness and so much pain. But I got my feet on there. And I feel the support now.

H: Yeah.

C: And with that support, I feel boundless potential for the upwards as well. And I'm hoping to reflect that in the music creation process too. And I'm hoping that that's just me on a microcosm, but that on a macrocosm that we're actually all going through this together.

H: Yeah. This and something you were talking about earlier reminds me so much of the experience of reading Dante's Divine Comedy, where you're going through circle by circle by circle, all of this darkness. And it almost is like, it's a lot to take in. But then all of the sudden,

you get past Satan, you crawl over his back, you look up and the end of the Inferno is, you see the stars. And all of a sudden, everything that's been ... you've been traveling down, it's *underneath* you. You're on the other side of the world and you're ascending. That's what all of this is calling to mind, which is so powerful.

C: Well, yeah, you're bringing light to a very ancient text too. I mean, by comparing it to the arc of literature, it goes back to the origins. And that storyline for the human of going to the darkest places and coming out into the light has been there from the beginning.

H: I also have to say I love talking about Anakin Skywalker experiencing a dark night of the soul.

C: My five-year-old is really into Star Wars. I've seen the scene where he turns dark, and that was the closest thing I've seen in cinema that I felt like I could "pop culture" make a reference to. But yeah.

B: Craig, thank you for being so generous with your time. And even more, thank you for being so willing to make that journey through the darkness to the light, which of course is just an ongoing one for all of us. But in doing so and sort of modeling that even though it's hard, that we do it together and we do it with this sort of energy of the divine love, as you mentioned. You cast a really bright light for us and for so many.

H: And I think the music is an invitation to take that journey with you, which is just really amazing. It's a gift.

B: So here's to putting Yale Divinity School on the concert tour for the next album. Let me just plant that seed. We've got a beautiful quad, and our students would come out and we'd have a great, great time.

C: Oh, I would absolutely love that. When you reached out about doing an interview, making sure that we brushed on topics that I wanted to brush on. Everything that you do is the topic I want to brush on. Most of the interviews that we do, you're talking about some relatively superficial stuff and I'm waiting to be able to get into this conversation. So thank you for just being this conversation.

[Music]

B: Thank you for listening to The Leader's Way. We hope you were encouraged and inspired. To learn more about this episode, visit our website at [berkeleydivinity.yale.edu/podcast](http://berkeleydivinity.yale.edu/podcast).

H: Rate and review us and follow the podcast to make sure you never miss an episode. Follow Berkeley at Yale on Instagram for quotes from the podcast and more. Until next time, the Lord be with you.