

Zach Bolen never saw himself working in ministry. Not only was he nowhere near envisioning himself on staff at a mega-church, he never imagined himself as a worship leader.

Hailing from the Northeast, Bolen moved to Georgia to attend the Savannah College of Art and Design. He began volunteering at a church nearby, and after graduating, accepted a full time position as the student ministries worship leader. Rounding up students to play and urging them to actively worship, Bolen felt his heart for ministry completely shift.

“God showed me I needed to love people,” he shares. “Everything about my life was centered on me, and here I was surrounded by people that needed to hear the gospel. They needed a dude who actually believed the Word.”

It was there that he started to develop the sound you’ll love as much as we do. Bolen began to cultivate passionate ideas about what worship could look like; noticing how musicians engaged and motivated their fans, Bolen was inspired to do the same. Instead of pursuing the crowd for his own sake, however, Bolen wanted to engage people through music for the glorification of God. Enter Citizens.

After moving to the Midwest with his wife and two children, Bolen felt compelled to leave his job. Less than a month later he received a call from Mars Hill, asking if he was interested in a position at their church. The phone interview didn’t go too well, but they still decided to fly him out for an in-person interview. That didn’t go too well either. Sitting at a Mariners game with one of the church’s lead pastors, Bolen admitted that whether Mars Hill offered him a job or not, he knew God was calling his family to Seattle and they’d be moving there regardless.

The next night Bolen was offered the worship leader position.

Looking back on it all, Bolen says he’s actually thankful the interviews went so badly, because, as he says, “It’s a constant reminder to me that I did nothing to put myself in this position—it’s solely the work of God and His providence.”

Bolen began working at the Mars Hill U-district campus. He started reconstructing the worship teams that played there, and in the process built a band of his own. Together with Nate Garvey, Adam Skatula, Nathan Furtado, and Tom McConnell, Citizens was created. Born out of Ephesians 2:19, the name *Citizens* brings to mind every Christian’s allegiance to God.

Bolen notes, “He made us citizens, and in that He has chosen to abide in us. In song, we’re all lead by the same spirit. We’re singing as one body, one family; we’re all conjoined together by Christ.”

Not only does that mindset play out in how they want to be viewed as a band on mission for Christ, it reveals itself visibly through the way they worship with a crowd. Bolen explained that he wanted to write arrangements that demanded participation, where the congregation felt inspired to participate in worship. The song “In Tenderness” is a perfect example. Bolen and

Garvey re-wrote a new melody and put the song in a key that had to be shouted in order to sing, leaving the crowd no choice but to join in shouting—and rejoicing.

The album, a compilation of re-arranged hymns and original songs, marries beautifully constructed lyrical truths with an energetic intensity that demands just what the band wants: participation. A dynamic sound showered in melodic moxie, Citizen's self-titled debut album is nothing short of spirited. Songs like "Jesus!" and "Made Alive" showcase their intentionally driving and catchy sound, where others, such as "I Am Living in the Land of Death" and "Oh God" provide cheerfully courageous battle cries. Their sound, straightforward and clean, allows their listeners to expect powerful tributes to God.

Bolen explains that the band's primary goal in writing these tributes is to remind people of the battle they've already won.

"We're in this war, but Jesus has already won it for us," he explains. "I tell my guys when we go out to play, to think of being the soldiers that run back to the city, proclaiming victory over our enemies. We want to be the people pounding on your door proclaiming triumph."

The song "Hail the King" exudes that temperament perfectly, with lines like "Praise the Savior / He has won / Our sin defeated through His blood / Now exalted Jesus reigns / Hail the king / Praise His name / We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God."

Another song that keeps with the theme of triumph is "The Sweetness of Freedom," an honest ballad that proclaims the joy of being renewed by God. Lines like "All my life I live to follow you alone / as you change my desires / liberated by the blood of Jesus / I found life in the sweetness of freedom" showcase the exact kind of elation Citizens wants to project.

Holding tightly to their purpose for being a band, Bolen stays emphatic about everything coming back to God. He notes, "We aren't trying to get people to worship the music, we're trying to get them to worship the god that created the music. There's something about music, if done in the right way... it makes us look at something bigger than us."

The album aims to project enthusiastic worship, passion, and whole-hearted gladness. It exceeds triumphantly.

As for his new position, Bolen feels at home working at Mars Hill. Founded in Seattle in 1996, Mars Hill Church is one of the largest and most-innovative churches in the US, with upwards of 14,000 people meeting weekly across multiple locations each week. Mars Hill has been recognized as the 28th largest, 3rd fastest-growing, and 2nd most-innovative church in the country by Outreach magazine. Pastor Mark Driscoll's sermons receive more than 10 million downloads per year, consistently rank #1 on iTunes, and he has over 450,000 combined followers on Facebook and Twitter.

Mars Hill Music, Citizens' label, is made up of a variety of musicians and worship leaders who serve throughout the various Mars Hill locations. Since its humble beginnings in 1996, Mars Hill has been committed to the philosophy that each local Mars Hill Church would engage the culture

in its local surroundings and point people to Jesus. Each Mars Hill band strives to do this with a natural expression and outgrowth of what God is doing in their cities.

In that same vision, the men of Citizens look forward to what God has in store for them in Seattle. Bolen may have never seen himself working in ministry, but we're glad God did.