

INTRODUCTION TO I WILL BE WHAT I BELIEVE

This Primary music journey all started with a challenge from my wife, Kaicie, when she simply said, “Hey, you should write a Primary song.” She was the Primary chorister and I was her sleepy pianist (I was an orthopedic surgery resident at the time). We had been a music duo in our ward for a couple of years, and she wanted some fresh music. I had written a few EFY-style songs in high school and on my mission, plus a couple of wedding songs for her, but I had never attempted a Primary song. I’m usually up to a challenge so I said, “Yes!” I thought about my favorite stories of the Church: Joseph Smith, the pioneers, the stripling warriors, Nephi, and missionaries. I decided to roll them all up into one great song. At the time, I had also been studying one of my all-time favorite talks: “The Challenge to Become” by Dallin H. Oaks from the October 2000 general conference. He describes that the gospel isn’t about knowing something, but it is in fact about “becoming” something. Then, “I Will Be What I Believe” was born. The strange thing is that I never planned to do mash-ups necessarily. I had been jazzing up Janice Kapp Perry’s “Army of Helaman” in Primary for a while and by sheer happenstance realized that I could sing “Army of Helaman” over the top of the chorus of “I Will Be What I Believe.” I worried that the kids wouldn’t be able to sing the mash-up part without getting lost or offbeat. However, I discovered through all of this that the kids can actually pull it off. What I came to love about mash-ups is that the mixing of songs is both musically interesting and spiritually enlightening. I found that, in general, this song style not only powerfully reinforces the quintessence of the song, but it also shines fresh light on a classic song, allowing you to think about it in a different way that enlarges the soul.

You’ll notice that in most of the mash-ups, I typically use the most commonly sung verses. I do this for a couple of reasons. First, almost all of us know the first verse to most of these songs and can generally sing it without looking at the words. I don’t want people to be burdened by trying to learn multiple verses. I’ve been the choir director as well, and you always need a song that can be learned easily and quickly. But the most important reason why I use the first verse is that I want people to be able to sing these songs *without music*. I want them to feel the beauty of the words and the musical intricacies of the mash-ups. Sometimes when singing mash-ups, you have to put the music down, close your eyes, trust in the basic beat and your knowledge of the song, and just sing it!

Throughout this whole process, I have come to love writing Primary songs. They teach important gospel principles in simple terms and are the backbone to many testimonies. I often think

about how I was touched by both the music and the words of many Primary songs growing up. In times of difficulty and trial, the words of Primary songs still come to my mind and answer my heart's deepest questions. Their messages provide solace to the soul. Moreover, I also love watching a child's face as they learn a new song, internalize the words, and then sing this new piece of their testimony with commitment and strength. Plus, the simple melodies are easier to write and play, which is something I appreciate since I'm not a great sight reader myself.

I hope and pray that you find joy in the music, and that we build up a new generation of children who "become" what they believe.

Blake Gillette