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GWU Divinity Professor Reviews New U2 Album

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Office of University
Communications

September 26, 2014

Dr. Steve Harmon Explores Theology of Band's Roots, New Release

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. —U2 forged a music career by blending the spiritual and secular worlds, and the band revisits its theological roots in its latest album, Gardner-Webb University Professor Dr. Steve Harmon offered in recent reviews for the Associated Baptist Press and WGWG.org.

Harmon teaches in the GWU School of Divinity and specializes in Christianity, religion and theology. After discovering U2 as a high school student about 30 years ago, he has maintained an interest in the band, often reviewing the group's albums.

The new album, "Songs of Innocence," returns to U2's Irish and spiritual beginnings, he said. Some songs create a light mood, while others convey the band's traditional message that all is not right in the world.

"At one level, you have songs that are primarily about very specific experiences, so there should be the caution in listening to this album to not read something spiritual and theological into everything," Harmon proposed in the WGWG.org interview. "But the album connects to a broader story, the Christian story that shaped the band. During their formative years in Dublin, they encountered Christian faith."

To request a transcript for the above audio interview, call 704.406.4264 or email servicerequests@gardner-webb.edu.

From U2's beginning, the group has woven the sacred and the secular throughout its music, Harmon reflected. "There's this sense that the whole world is God's world," he said. "Anything going on within it is fair game for being of theological significance. You're never able to say this is spiritual significance, or this part is secular in their music. It's all blended together."

The band did make at least one major change with its launch of "Songs of Innocence" by giving the music to millions of listeners for free through iTunes. Music download services like iTunes have impacted physical album sales in recent years, Harmon said. Musicians often

construct an album with themes that unite songs, but the ability to download a single song or a group of songs has changed the way listeners consume music. U2's release of its entire album, which surprised many iTunes users with an automatic download, helped ensure that the songs remained intact as a larger work, Harmon suggested.

"It is really a brilliant move," Harmon said of the band's free offering. "U2 has taken the technology that has all but killed off the album and ensured that people will hear what was conceived as an integrated album in which all the songs relate to the whole."

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