

## Kirk Franklin has Something to Shout About

By Sonsyrea Tate

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The question gave him pause at first, but Kirk Franklin is a man quick on his feet.

“I think that what church is defined as is not something to be temporary like drugs,” Franklin said, explaining that when he traded drugs for Jesus he was not simply changing one head fix for another. “It’s something that’s supposed to have an eternal benefit to it, that is building something more than just this high, that is building character, that is building strength, establishing one’s identity, one’s faith, teaching one about who he or she truly is versus, you know, when you party, when you go out for that moment. Once that moment’s passed. So, that’s the great difference,” he said.

Franklin was here earlier this month promoting his newest CD, *Hero*, the first release of his new record label, Fo Yo Soul Entertainment (in association with the Zomba Label Group). *Hero*, his first CD since his 2002 platinum-selling *The Rebirth of Kirk Franklin*, brings together Gospel artists and R&B legends, and mixes Hip-Hop and Rock. Franklin has been commended for similar efforts on his previous CD’s with record-breaking sales, 3 Grammy’s, 33 Stellar and 9 Dove Awards.

Franklin’s life story is posted on his website – [www.kirkfranklin.us](http://www.kirkfranklin.us). He was abandoned by both parents, raised by an aunt, who invested in piano lesson for him, later he smoked pot, partied with pot pushers, and got a girl pregnant when he was 17. One of the songs, “Let it Go”, mentions porn he once found appealing, and getting high on the church parking lot after church. *Shout, shout, let it all out. These are the things I can do without*, is the refrain, a remake of Rock classic. Franklin prevailed, thanks to God’s love for him, he says, and thanks to his prevailing faith in God.

When he exploded onto the music scene in 1993 with his debut CD, *Kirk Franklin and the Family*, which resonated with millions, he did not have a message or a mission guiding his work. What he had was an absolute love for performing.

“I think that I kind of evolved to have a message,” he said. “I mean, generally, I think, there’s always a subject of my faith, that I’m a Christian and I love God, and that you don’t have to serve God and do music just in one, particular way to be a Christian musician, but I think my message is more targeted now to empower people in their faith, not in their religion, but in their faith,” Franklin said. “One, I believe, is oppressive, and the other one is freeing.”

He believes that having a personal relationship with God, and reflecting that in one’s lifestyle may or may not include practicing a religion.

His message at the Urban Music Conference, sponsored by W-PGC last weekend was consistent with what he’s been saying for years. “You have to have an identity outside of what you do,” he said. “If someone asks you, ‘who is Michael Jordan?’ You would say he’s a basketball player. That’s not who he is, that’s what he does. A lot of times, with people who are gifted, what they do becomes their identity. What they do becomes who they are, and your occupation should never be your definition.”

It wasn't gospel that most influenced him in his youth. It was Stevie Wonder and Run-DMC. His new record label will not be limited to Christian artists.

"I wanted to work with career artists," he said, explaining why he launched a label. "Now, you know, with artists, it's all about the first week sales, it's all about the single. That's not a career. So, we want to stay small enough to be able to cultivate other people's career."