

CPYU 3(D) REVIEW

Song/Video: "Circus" by Britney Spears

Background/summary: This second single-release off the Britney Spears' album of the same name dropped with a big splash in early December of 2008. Part of the marketing package in the effort to facilitate the singer's comeback, the song has been received well by Spears' fan base with some of them calling it the best video she's ever done. Because Spears is a long-time pop culture icon who is back on the pop culture landscape in a big way, this song is worthy of our attention, understanding, and response.

Discover: What is the message/worldview?:

- The song's video and lyrics send a strong message regarding Spears' self-understanding, who she intends to be as a pop icon, and how those things fit into the so-far successful plan to recover and reinvent her music career. The video's opening scene pictures Spears' in a dressing room as she prepares to enter the "circus" of today's highly populated popular music scene to take what she thinks is her place in the center ring. Observant viewers will note that her dressing room table and preparatory routine include two fragrances from her perfume line, Fantasy and Curious. . . . some obvious product placement.
- Spears explains that "there's only two types of people in the world." The "ones that entertain and the ones that observe." She then confidently proclaims that she's a "put-on-a-show kind of girl" who's "gotta be first" and got to be the "ringleader" calling the shots.
- As Spears steps into and stays in the center ring for the remainder of the video, she is surrounded by a variety of dancers, circus performers, and circus animals in a dimly lit and dark setting. She confesses that the stage and dance floor are where she belongs, that this is her stage, and that being there sends the adrenaline through her veins.
- She tells listeners that she'll be cracking the whip and getting everyone to obey her commands as they follow her. . . . something that will happen since "all eyes (are) on me in the center of the ring."
- She continues by explaining that there are two kinds of guys in the world: "ones that can hang with me, and ones that are scared." Again, she plays the role of the leader. The video visually portrays this as Spears' assumes her characteristic dance moves and apparel, all the while playing the sexual object who entices and leads guys on. Some of her male dancers take the bait, ogling over her body and seeing that body as her identity.



Discern: How does it stand in light of the biblical message/worldview?

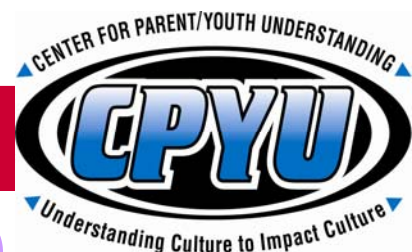
- Like so many kids in today's youth culture, Britney Spears continues to show evidence of her deep search for meaning, purpose, significance, and redemption. While we should applaud her desire to move away from a period in her life where she experienced a very high-profile meltdown, we must also acknowledge that human resolve, marketing efforts, and personal reinvention can never truly make a person over. Like all humanity, Spears has experienced the chapters in the unfolding biblical story known as "Creation" and "Fall." She longs to experience the chapter titled "Redemption." The Scriptures are clear: yes, redemption is what we need. But the only source of redemption is the God-man, Jesus Christ, who is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

- All humanity is created in the image of God. Therefore, we are called to function as creative beings by creating out of the created order in a manner which serves as worship, bringing honor and glory to God. We must applaud Spears' creative talents. We must also applaud her efforts to be who she was made to be, something evident as she feels "the adrenaline moving through my veins." It seems that Spears has experienced a partial discovery of vocation and place (i.e. her "great joy") as described by theologian Frederick Buechner: "That place where your great joy meets the world's great need."
- Spears' desire is not to channel the glory to her Creator. Rather, her desire is one of selfish narcissism that focus all eyes on the holy trinity of me, myself, and I. In addition, she sets herself up to be followed. The Scriptures regularly remind us that "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." As followers of Christ, we are called to "clothe yourselves with humility" (1 Peter 5:5).
- As a map for impressionable young viewers and listeners, Spears' music – including "Circus" – sends the clear message that one's identity is found in things like fame, fortune, and appearance. We are not objects to be idolized and worshipped by others due to our fame, good looks, or sex appeal. Instead, we are to find our identity in Christ alone. Anything else is idolatry.



Decide: What do I do with it?

- Because it serves as a map for kids and window into their world, "Circus" should be viewed, deconstructed, and discussed by all those called to nurture, love, and lead kids (parents, youth workers, educators, pastors, etc.). By seeing and hearing firsthand the compelling and convincing form and content of the video's messages, we will then understand the emerging worldview more clearly. Then, we can speak God's unchanging truth to the cultural messages and realities that exist.
- The video serves as a powerful springboard for discussion with young Britney Spears' fans. After viewing the video, discuss the issues raised in the song including narcissism, celebrity, human depravity, the longing for redemption, idolatry, humility, vocation, etc. Use it as an opportunity to bring the light of God's Word to bear on each of these issues, thereby helping kids see that God *does* have something to say about each.
- Because marketing is the media outlet currently influencing children and teens most deeply, take time to teach kids how they are marketed to. Discuss marketing and how it figures into the Britney Spears' comeback campaign. In addition, use "Circus" as an example of product placement.
- "Circus" is an ideal song to use to teach your kids how to think Christianly and biblically about all music and media. Show it to your group and then take the time to break into groups to filter the song and video through CPYU's *How To Use Your Head to Guard Your Heart* 3(D) media evaluation guide (available online at www.cpyu.org).
- The history and music of Britney Spears serves as a powerful reminder of our need to pray for our children and teens. They are hungry for heaven. Their's is a dark world. They are broken. And, they are confused. Ask God's Spirit to melt their hearts and to incline their ears towards their Heavenly Father. Finally, do the same for Britney Spears.



To access additional 3(D) reviews, to learn more about today's youth culture, and to order copies of *How to Use Your Head to Guard Your Heart: A 3(D) Guide to Making Responsible Media Choices*, visit our website at www.cpyu.org