

Eddie Watkins Jr. is on a roll. He's been on one ever since he threw out all his old ideas regarding himself, his talent and his reason for living. Given where he'd been, it wasn't such a bad idea.

“Everything that's happening now is the result of a decision I made to turn my life over, and my career and my talent, to this ministry.”

That, in his own words, is how it is that Watkins has ended up music manager and choir director at the Center for Spiritual Living, Seattle, music director for the Centers for Spiritual Living's annual Asilomar conference this summer – and walking, talking, living, breathing laboratory for a divine experiment in music.

It was not always thus.

By 2005, Watkins was tired of managing a band he'd founded more than a dozen years earlier. He'd moved to Las Vegas seeking a steady gig, a regular paycheck and the benefits that go with a conventional job, but found himself commuting to Southern California for work with his Go Big Daddy Band.

A steady diet of weddings and corporate parties, and the soggy prefab “bandwidges” fed the musicians who play such events while the guests eat lobster and steak, had him wondering: What now? What's next?

“I was pretty much burnt out on it. And this is after having had a pretty good career as a session bass player, touring around the world. It was always the same thing.

“It just felt like a dead end to me. There was nowhere to go. I wasn't pursuing my love, which was writing and producing.”

This was no idle fantasy, no mere daydreaming of what might have been. Eddie Watkins Jr. has long been a name among session musicians, a staple, the man you go to when you want skilled bass guitar at your back.

He was born in Michigan in 1954, raised in Detroit during Motown's most prolific and influential years. He grew up among storied musicians, and played back-up for the best of the best, including Smokey Robinson and The Temptations.

“I actually started playing for Motown when I was 17. I was still in high school.”

Drugs and booze came along with all the rehearsal and recording. He followed Motown to California in 1977 and some things changed, a lot. Los Angeles was not the company town Detroit had been.

Watkins got calls, not just from Motown, but from Epic, Warner Bros., Atlantic. And the crowd he worked with got steadily faster and flashier, and now included Donna Summer, Diana Ross, Quincy Jones.

“It was a lot different, because see, in Detroit, Motown was the only game in town,” Watkins says. “Everything just blew wide open for me as a bass player.”

So did the drinking and drugging.

“We'd do these recording sessions and there'd be booze, and there'd be drugs. I was just absorbed into that culture. And then discovered that I had a propensity to addiction.”

Cocaine escalated to crack. Watkins refers to the early 1980s as “the time of my dysfunction.” It's an understatement; at some point in all of it, he went looking for death.

“I was making a lot of money as a bass player. I hit some pretty serious bottoms,” Watkins recalls. “I remember one incident when a couple of buddies and I were out looking for cocaine and some dope dealers started shooting, and I was looking for the crossfire. I was looking to end my life.

“I was hearing nothing. The addiction was in full swing. I started creating this amazing wreckage in my life, my daughters, my wife at the time. I was hopeless.”

In 1994, Watkins started putting his band together and met a guitar player “in a similar situation.” Watkins then missed a couple of rehearsals, part of the wreckage he was busily making of his life.

“The guy said, ‘Listen. I know you have a problem because I have a problem.’ I went to an AA meeting with the guy and thought, ‘These people are telling my story.’”

And yet, “I was still hip, slick and cool. I still was not teachable.”

In 1995, after several more nightmarish months, Watkins reached what he hopes was his final bottom.

“I knew that I was going to get sober or die,” he says. “What turned me around was looking for a God of my understanding.”

Watkins came to God through AA. He’s been hanging out with God ever since, much of that time in Science of Mind.

He attended Agape International Spiritual Center while he was still living in Southern California, but it wasn’t until he moved to Nevada about the time he got sober that he made Science of Mind an active part of his life. By the time he arrived, Las Vegas was changing, big showrooms were closing and his dream of a regular gig was evaporating. He had his sobriety and his wife, Donice, but not much else.

“I was thinking that I needed to get connected with a spiritual community,” Watkins says. “Vegas is not a place you want to be without a spiritual community.

“I had an Ernest Holmes book that I’d had since (attending Agape in) 1995, but I had no idea he had a church.”

Watkins ended up at what was formerly called the First Church of Religious Science (the community is now the Center for Spiritual Living, Greater Law Vegas). Doug Foglesong was then, and is now, minister of the Las Vegas community. Watkins remembers thinking, ““Is this,

like, aliens and Tom Cruise?’ And then the name Ernest Holmes popped up. What We Believe (Holmes’ statement summarizing the Science of Mind philosophy) is exactly what I believed.

“We walked in on a Wednesday and we never walked out.”

What has followed, what has happened in Watkins’ life as the result of that first visit, is nothing less than a radical restructuring of Watkins’ relationship with the divine. Introduced to a higher power through his 12-step participation, the professional musician has found himself the recipient of a never-ceasing stream of music, the ongoing gift of an unfailing, and unfailingly imaginative, God.

And along with the music has come opportunity. Foglesong created a spot for Watkins as music coordinator at the Las Vegas church, a position he held for two years before taking the job in Seattle last year.

“Everything changed for me at that point. The ‘everything’ is that I had a revelation that this is what I’m supposed to be doing with my life, where my music is supposed to go.

“I would wake up in the morning and songs would start pouring out of me. Within six months, my CD was done, produced, packaged and selling. I was called. It was a divine compulsion to do this.

“That journey was pretty incredible, because when the CD came out, I started traveling around the country. And to see how the music was received was pretty incredible for me. On and on, these opportunities would show up.”

For Watkins, it was clear that the source of the music had changed. Before, “Songs would come. Heartbreak, infidelity, heart in pain, but that was mostly it. There was nothing there that held my heart. Longing, hurting, hoping ...”

He worried when he compared himself to Karen Drucker, Michael Gott, Daniel Nahmod and other notable New Thought musicians. God wasn’t interested in his petty concerns, apparently.

“A voice came to me and said, ‘That’s not your problem.’ And then I didn’t care anymore. I just knew this was what I was supposed to be doing.”

For a man who has spent his career working with some of the best musicians in America, Watkins remains impressed with and grateful to Gott and Drucker, with whom he worked at the 2007 Asilomar conference, and others.

“I got to meet the cream of the crop,” he says, adding of Drucker, “She really, really looked out for me and gave me information about New Thought artists and how to conduct business as a New Thought artist.”

Having unlocked the creativity principle in his own life, Watkins has continued to ride the tide of imagination that has surged through him ever since.

“Nothing’s changed. The songs have never stopped. I’m writing along and observing, and I’m amazed every day. It is so much more exciting than all the other stuff.

“It’s a ride. I’m kind of riding along. It was the decision to turn it over, and not really worry about the details of it. Once you get to that point, you can be free of the anxiety about, ‘What am I going to do?’ It is already done.”

What Watkins is doing now is playing God’s music as his ministry, rather than playing his own music as an ego trip.

“My concept of being of service came from AA,” he says. “I was a pretty successful bass player and a pretty successful drug addict, too. But in AA, I ended up sweeping the floor, making coffee, picking up doughnuts. It was kind of natural to me to be of service. So everything I’m doing now is based on being of service.

“I have to ask, ‘What would be the motives?’ Fame? You can be a successful axe murderer and become famous. But fame is a fleeting thing. It’s pretty empty. There’s nothing.”

Eddie Watkins should know. He's been there and back, and has the guitar licks to prove it.

"You'd sell yourself short if you tried to write it down," he observes. That said, he tries to be faithful to what God would have him write down. For the stewardship campaign at the Center for Spiritual Living, Seattle, he penned these lyrics last year:

Make real, your dreams

Say yes! Nothing's

Impossible when you

Know.

No star, too high

To reach for, just try

Believe it, see it as

So ...

Eddie Watkins has no reason to doubt it.

SIDEBAR

Give a listen

To listen to the sound of Eddie Watkins Jr., check the Center for Spiritual Living, Seattle, Web site at <http://www.spiritualliving.org/>

Watkins' CDs include "The Answer," "We Come Together" and "And So It Is," released last year.

For more information on Watkins' Go Big Daddy Band, go to <http://gobigdaddyband.com>