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Sponsor: So I've been podcasting since 2014. And let me tell you, things are definitely changing and have definitely changed and grown in the podcast world from the technology to the variety of options to the number of people listening to podcasts. It's part of the reason we grew from the That Sounds Fun podcast to the That Sounds Fun Network.

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[00:01:27] <music>

Annie: Hi, Friends, Welcome to a special episode of That Sounds Fun. Happy Friday. I'm your host Annie F. Downs. I'm so happy to be here with you today.

First of all, how much did y'all love Mike Kelsey hosting this week? If you have not listened to the Monday and Thursday episodes, go do that today. Make that part of your weekend. They are such good shows.

And I hope you saw or read that we are doing an Advent series here on That Sounds Fun. It'll start on November 27th, go all the way to Christmas Eve. Episodes almost every day, you guys. We're gonna do like 10-minute devotional

episodes every weekday of Advent. It is going to be so fun. We've never done anything like this. And we are so excited to celebrate Advent with you in a brand new way.

There's a lot of other stuff included. We've built out a whole experience for you and for your kids. Things like videos of every devotional if you'd rather watch than listen, an Advent series guidebook that you can print out that will help you walk through the whole season, some journaling prompts scriptures. It's beautiful. You're gonna love it.

An advent calendar, liturgical calendar, stuff for MiniBFFs and a Facebook group that is just for our friends who are studying and experiencing and observing Advent together. You can get access to all of that at anniefdowns.com/advent. So make sure you head over there and check that out. We are really, really excited about it.

Intro: Today on the show, you guys, we have never done anything like this. This may be one of my new favorite episodes we've ever done. Today on the show, I get to talk with my friend Jeff Pardo.

Now, you may not know him, but you've heard us mention his name before and you definitely know his work. He's a native of Chicago and a Nashvillian via Belmont University. But he's been part of the Nashville music community since 2000 as a touring musician, a Grammy-nominated songwriter, and a producer.

In the past year, he's had multiple number ones on Billboard, including *In Jesus Name* by our sweet friend Katy Nicole and *Yes He Can* by my adoptive siblings in the band CAIN. His songs have been featured on country and CCM and movie trailers and TV spots, like American Idol and Station 19. He is everywhere you guys.

He has songs with a gazillion of our favorite artists: Tauren, Lady A, Mandisa, Matthew West, Zach Williams, Ben Rector. I mean, we could go on and on and on. He has written and worked with just about all of our favorite That Sounds Fun artists friends. He's ridiculously talented, and he and his wife are ridiculously good friends to me.

So here's what we wanted to do with Jeff, with the Dove Awards taking place here in Nashville last week. Okay, get this. Jeff was nominated for nine Dove Awards in six different categories. Yes, that means he was nominated more than once in some of the same categories. And of everyone nominated for Dove Awards, you guys, Jeff Pardo had the most nominations of everyone, you know, in Christian music. He had the most nominations this year.

So here's what we decided to do. And I thought this was so brave and so cool of him. He popped into the studio before and after the Dove Awards to talk about how he felt and what he was processing before the night of the award show and how he felt after the results were in.

No, I'm not going to spoil that now if you don't already know, because you get to hear me find out live on the episode as well. So literally I don't know which awards, if any, that Jeff won until we are sitting in the studio and hit "record". Y'all, this is awesome.

So here's my first part of the conversation with my friend Jeff Pardo.

[00:05:24] <music>

Annie: Jeff Pardo, welcome to That Sounds Fun.

Jeff: It's good to be here.

Annie: Dude, you are the name... It is so funny because we talk about you constantly on this show. Have you ever heard this?

Jeff: From Anne and from Katy and from you. That is crazy.

Annie: Yes. Yes. Yes. I mean, you're kind of the name that everybody's like, "They keep name dropping Jeff Pardo."

Jeff: Right. You're right.

Annie: So welcome. Welcome. This is a very fun episode. I want to tell everybody today is October 12th. The Dove Awards are on Wednesday, October 19th. When did they get televised? Are they immediate? Or are we not allowed to tell?

Jeff: No, I think it's the Friday. I think it's Tuesday. They film on Tuesday.

Annie: I'm sorry. They film on Tuesday.

Jeff: Yes.

Annie: That's right. That's right.

Jeff: Then the next Friday it airs. So all the information is like hush, hush until Friday.

- Annie:** Until Friday. Okay, that's good for us to remember that we can... I don't think we're releasing it before that. But let me look to make sure. Yeah, not till the end of the month. Okay. So we're recording this part the week before the Dove Awards.
- Jeff:** Yes.
- Annie:** How Dove Awards are you nominated for?
- Jeff:** I'm nominated for nine Dove Awards.
- Annie:** Nine Dove Awards. Who has more nominations this year than you?
- Jeff:** I knew you were gonna ask that and it's gonna make me get a red in the face, which is good it's a podcast. People can't see. I'm nominated for the most awards of the year.
- Annie:** Jeff, you are nominated for more Dove Awards than anyone else.
- Jeff:** It's true.
- Annie:** That is unbelievable.
- Jeff:** It's unbelievable.
- Annie:** And yet you're not anyone people have seen on stage in a long time. They have seen you on stages, they just didn't know it. They haven't seen you on stage in a long time. They haven't gotten to a Jeff Pardo show.
- Jeff:** Correct.
- Annie:** So will you talk a little bit about what you do? What is your job in Christian music?
- Jeff:** So I'm a songwriter and record producer. So I work with all the artists... Well, I shouldn't say all the artists. But-
- Annie:** I mean, but kind of.
- Jeff:** Well, a lot of artists in our community, kind of helping them write songs, helping them make records. I've said for a couple years that I am someone who can help make arrows that someone else can shoot.
- Annie:** Oh, wow.

Jeff: Like my calling in my professional life has never been the front of the stage. It's always been the back. It's always been the supporter of the person who has the platform and has that gift of really connecting, you know, face-to-face with people.

And I think I've always said for a long time I'm a professional helper. So back when I was on the road, it was playing keyboards for people, helping music direct, helping an artist feel comfortable live. Like the everything behind them was going to be taken care of and going well so they could connect.

And now in this stage of my career, it's about helping artists write the songs that they want to write that can connect with the audience that they want to connect with. And then in some cases, helping them make those records. So-

Annie: That's really an explanation.

Jeff: I mean, I played on the road for a long time. My first gig right out of college was with this swing band called Denver And The Mile High Orchestra.

Annie: Oh, my gosh, yeah.

Jeff: And it was right out of the... I went to college from 2000 to 2004 at Belmont.

Annie: Did you come here to do music?

Jeff: I did, yeah. And so actually-

Annie: We've been friends for 15 years and I do not know this answer.

Jeff: No, that's good. That's why this is beautiful.

Annie: That's why podcasts are great.

Jeff: I came here to do music and really came down thinking that I wanted to be an artist. That's actually kind of a good part of my story, I think, is I was coming here thinking I was going to do something. When I was at Belmont, it was really interesting to see my friends react to me as the helper, where I just started getting involved like in the studio and writing songs with friends. You know, Belmont is such a musical community. That's in the DNA.

And when I would be in the role that's closest to what I do now, my friends were like, "Man, you're really good at this. Will you come play on my showcase? Will you come in the studio with me? Would you help me write a song?" And when it

was Jeff the artist, it was always like, "Yeah, that's okay." There wasn't a whole lot of interest in that.

But coming from Chicago where I grew up, that's what... I mean. I grew up listening to Michael W. Smith, Steven Curtis Chapman, Billy Joel. Being an artist was what I wanted to do. And when I got here, I remember my junior year of college, I really kind of had to put that down because I was starting... like Denver had called, which is... Denver, by the way, is the singer's name. Everybody gets that, you know, like, "Oh, this is from Denver.

Annie: The city, yeah.

Jeff: It's the singer. I mean, that was a Lord-led thing. It really was like, "You need to put down the dream you thought you had in order to follow me into something that you don't totally understand."

Annie: Oh, my gosh, Jeff.

Jeff: I think in some ways I can look at my career now and go back to that junior year of college and go, "I don't think it would look like this if I hadn't made that decision at that point."

Annie: Wow, that is unbelievable.

Jeff: So anyway, wanted to come down here and be an artist. I found that wasn't my path. I toured for a long time. I played with Matthew West on the road for a long time.

Annie: Was he after Denver?

Jeff: After Denver, yes. So I played Matthew for five years and then I've been off the road making records full-time for eight years. But Matthew was the five years before that.

Annie: Wow. I had no idea. I mean, what a story for all of us in our lives, that you pursue one thing and God goes, "What if we turn to the left?" And you turn to the left and 15 years later... That is insane, Jeff.

Jeff: And find what I was actually being made to do.

Annie: Yeah.

Jeff: You know what I mean? My vision... it wasn't totally off. It was like I felt like, well, I've been given this musical gift and this seems to be affirmed by community. But the way I thought I was going to express it was different. And I think that's true for anything, not just art-related career.

Annie: Right.

Jeff: I mean, just those little pivots that end up being the path.

Annie: Gosh, that's really good. So you've been off the road for eight years?

Jeff: Eight years. Yes.

Annie: But you also taught me... We have to say this.

Jeff: Yes, we do.

Annie: The number one tip anyone has ever taught me about the road-

Jeff: Because you've talked about this on this podcast.

Annie: I will shout this from the rooftops. This is the most important. So tell us, what is your number one tip to anybody who is on the road.

Jeff: When you come home, especially if you travel a lot, and you're in and out a lot, when you come home, unpack your suitcase right away, put your things away, put all your bathroom stuff away, because you will feel like you're at home and you won't feel like you're traveling all the time.

Annie: Even if it's two days.

Jeff: Just do it and you'll feel normal. It is the best thing I did when I was on the road when it comes to all the travel stuff.

Annie: Yes, it has changed my life.

Jeff: And you've adopted it.

Annie: Oh my gosh, it changed my life. Because now every single time I, all the way, unpack even if I'm home for two days. So right now I'm home for four. And it would have been really easy to leave a suitcase on the floor. And I've done it before.

Jeff: Sure.

Annie: Actually, in this moment I can confirm there's not a suitcase on my floor. But most times it is the second I get home, dirty clothes in the dirty clothes basket, clean clothes put away, unpack my make-up bag.

Jeff: Preach, my friend.

Annie: That's the one that can really get me, it's just leave your makeup bag. No, no. Unpack your makeup, unpack the whole thing.

Jeff: Because you're home. You're not in between. You're home.

Annie: That's exactly right.

Jeff: It helps my mind a lot.

Annie: Yes, that's exactly right. And you and your wife... I met you because you started dating my friend.

Jeff: Yes, I did.

Annie: And you married her, which I'm thrilled about.

Jeff: I married your friend.

Annie: And y'all have kids together, and that makes me very happy. But you know you also inspire me because you know the winky face story. Do you know how proud she is?

Jeff: I don't know the winky face story.

Annie: So Marisa and I shared an office at the time. And y'all started by DMing.

Jeff: We did. Well, okay-

Annie: Right?

Jeff: I met her... So a friend of mine, a guy named Andy Hunt, who you know, invited me to a dinner. He just kind of randomly invited me. I met Marisa there.

Annie: Were you like, "Hello?"

Jeff: There was definitely a thing. Just like a little bit of energy that was like, "Oh, okay." At that time it was Twitter.

Annie: It was Twitter. That's right.

Jeff: Because we've been married for 10 years. So we're talking, well, 10 and a half years old. Eleven and a half years ago. So it's Twitter. The DM thing had come up in conversation that night. I don't remember what the context was. But then I sent her a message on Twitter, asked if she wanted to go out the next night.

Annie: Yes, you did.

Jeff: Which is where you enter the story.

Annie: Because she was... I think y'all... Did y'all joke around first? Wasn't there like a DM, DM and then you asked her out?

Jeff: Yeah, yes. Okay. Yes, that's right. It was during dinner I think we sent DMs back and forth, which related to the conversation. I don't remember what it was.

Annie: And she used a winky face.

Jeff: That's right.

Annie: And she was like, "I can't believe I'm doing this." I mean, the next day at work she was like, "I put a winky face in our DM." And we're like, "Oh, here we go. Oh, you did a winky face?" One of y'all did a winky face. she did.

Jeff: No, no, no, no, that's right. That's right, she did.

Annie: And then you asked her out for the next night and we're like, "Winky faces work." I cannot tell you how strategic I am with winky faces in my DMs because of Marisa Pardo.

Jeff: There you go.

Annie: That is-

Jeff: Yes, be careful.

Annie: That's right. Be careful.

Jeff: Be ready.

Annie: That moves things.

Jeff: That's right.

Annie: It's gonna move when winky face moves it. Okay, Dove Awards. You've been nominated before?

Jeff: I have been nominated before. Yeah.

Annie: Okay.

Jeff: My first one that I got was for a song called *When Mercy Found Me* that I wrote with a guy named Rhett Walker 10 years ago.

Annie: So you won that one?

Jeff: Did not win. Nope. Nope. I've been a multiple-time Dove Awards loser.

Annie: Same. I'm a Klove loser.

Jeff: Yes, right.

Annie: So you've never won one? This could be first year.

Jeff: I've never won.

Annie: This is why I'm so thankful you're doing this Jeff because I think this will be so interesting. For our friends listening, they probably already heard this in some form or fashion. But we're talking today and then we're going to talk again right after the day after the Doves. And you are nominated for nine and we're going to see what happens and really talk about it.

Jeff: Yeah, totally.

Annie: But as of right now, you've been nominated multiple times but you have won.

Jeff: Not one.

Annie: Does it mean anything to win to you? Does it not mean anything, as in your soul? I know it means something career wise. So let's talk about both.

Jeff: Okay. I think anybody who says it doesn't mean anything to win is lying. I really do. But I'll caveat that with this. I think it's a bigger deal at least for me in my satisfaction and that feeling of like soulfulness that it's my work. It really is a bigger deal to be nominated. Because I think there's something about a community of people that is acknowledging a group of work and going like, "Out of all the songs that fit into this category this particular year, here are the five that people voted on the go. We think these are the best expression."

Annie: Who votes on Doves?

Jeff: It's The Gospel Music Association.

Annie: Got it. Okay. Okay.

Jeff: So I think being acknowledged in a community of people that are my friends and my peers that I really respect and really like, that's the bigger thing. And I think that's the bigger affirmation. What I would say is the bigger affirmation of my gifts and my calling is that.

Annie: Got it.

Jeff: I just don't believe anybody who's like, "Yeah, but I don't care about winning." It's like, of course, I want to win things because I'm human being. We want to win things. It's like, Why do I get mad when the Bears are playing? It's like, I want the Bears to win. I want the Cubs to win.

But I'll say, like win or lose, I do think the bigger thing is, man, one of your songs meant something to the bigger community and they acknowledged that. That's encouraging for me to go, "I think this is a good path for my life. And I think I should keep doing this work."

[00:16:55] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about one of our amazing partners, [Operation Christmas Child](#). Operation Christmas Child is a project of the Christian International Relief organization, Samaritan's Purse, and it is the world's largest Christmas project of its kind. Their mission is to demonstrate God's love in a tangible way to children in need around the world and to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

Since 1993, Operation Christmas Child has collected and delivered more than 198 million, you guys, 198 million gift-filled shoeboxes to children in over 170 countries and territories. The gifts are delivered through local churches which I

know we love, and every shoebox gift is an opportunity to share with the children how much Jesus loves them.

This year, Operation Christmas Child is hoping to collect enough shoebox gifts to reach an additional 11 million kids. Will you join Operation Christmas Child this season by packing shoebox gifts or building shoebox gifts online? It's brilliant the way they have the site set up so you can fill a box virtually "this is how I'm going to do it."

Anyone can pack a shoebox: individuals, families, churches, students, and friend groups. When you do, you're becoming a tangible part of the story of these kids' lives as you show them love and help introduce them to the gospel.

And packing a shoebox is a great way to teach the MiniBFFs in our lives about thankfulness and living generously. National Collection week is November 14 through 21 and you can drop off your shoeboxes in nearly 5,000 drop-off locations.

Part of this milestone year as Operation Christmas Child expects to collect and celebrate its 200,000,000th gift-filled shoebox since it all started in 1993. But that's only possible through the help of friends like you. So visit samaritanspurse.org/occ to learn how to pack a shoebox, or build one online. Again that's samaritanspurse.org/occ.

[00:18:47] <music>

Annie: Professionally, like say you're a school teacher, when you get your specialist or your masters, immediately your pay goes up.

Jeff: Right.

Annie: So is a thing like winning an award of any kind change what you could charge? Do you get more work? You don't have time for more work.

Jeff: It's funny. A friend of mine asked me that last week who works in advertising. And I told him, I was like, "I don't know. It doesn't hurt."

Annie: Sure. Sure. Sure. Sure.

Jeff: I don't know if I'd point to winning something and going like, "Oh, this was where a transition happen to more things." But I think in front of a community of people that are my artistic creative community that are the people that I work with and then employ me, I certainly think it doesn't hurt.

Annie: You're nominated a couple of times. We're gonna run through these nominations real quick. Song of the Year, which everyone who gets nominated for Song of the Year is the people who wrote the song.

Jeff: Yes.

Annie: You're nominated twice in that category.

Jeff: It's true.

Annie: So you're nominated for *Come What May* and the artist... who's the artist?

Jeff: We Are Messengers.

Annie: Oh, gosh. How great is he?

Jeff: Well, Darren Mulligan.

Annie: I love Darren. I'm dying to have him on here. I met him once.

Jeff: Darren come and do this.

Annie: Serious.

Jeff: Come do the podcast.

Annie: I met him one time in a green room and he said very nice things. I said nice things about his work. We were friends automatically. And then he said, "And I think the Lord wants me to tell you something." And brought a word.

Jeff: Yeah, that's Darren.

Annie: That dude is charismatic and prophetic. And I love it. And then nominated for *My Jesus*, which is the Anne Wilson song.

Jeff: Anne Wilson.

Annie: Pop/Contemporary Recorded Song of the Year. So does the artists win that one or the writer?

Jeff: All the songs stuff is writers.

Annie: Got it.

- Jeff:** If the artist is a writer, then they're gonna win.
- Annie:** Got it. Got it. So you're nominated twice in that category as well. *In Jesus Name* with our friend Katy Nicole, *My Jesus* with Anne Wilson. Inspirational Recorded Song of the Year with Frannie, Francesca Battistelli, *God Is Good*. Bluegrass/Country/Roots Song of the Year with... Oh, Anne Wilson with Hillary, *Mamas*.
- Jeff:** Yeah, yeah, that Hillary sings with Anne.
- Annie:** That's a beautiful song.
- Jeff:** Me and Matthew and Anne wrote that song.
- Annie:** And Pop/Contemporary Album of the Year, which is *My Jesus* with Anne Wilson. So if y'all win that one, everyone will walk up. Anne will probably accept it, but you'll get the Dove.
- Jeff:** Yeah. So basically the people who get an Award for Album of the Year is the artist and then the producers.
- Annie:** Oh, and that's you.
- Jeff:** Yeah. And then I was the producer.
- Annie:** So you're nominated twice in that court category as well because you're nominated with Anne, Anne with CAIN, who I adore. I'm dying to be the fourth member of the CAIN family.
- Jeff:** Oh, man.
- Annie:** I love them so much. We wore matching shirts when they were in the studio.
- Jeff:** I was gonna literally gonna ask you if you wore matching shirts.
- Annie:** Yes, we wore matching. So for their album *Rise Up*. So in three categories you're double nominated. And then the one I have not mentioned yet, Producer of the Year. That is just Jeff Pardo. Your name is by yourself on that one.
- Jeff:** Yeah. So, yeah, that acknowledges different record producers kind of in our business. So I'm one of the five nominated this year, which is really encouraging. And I'm really grateful for it.

- Annie:** That's unbelievable. When I'm looking at this, I think there's a hierarchy of which ones I want you to win. Is there a hierarchy in your heart of which ones you win?
- Jeff:** No. But I'll say this. I think this could be maybe encouraging to the listeners of this. I think the one that might mean the most to me, and whether I win or not, is Producer of the Year. And that's because for a long time in my career I think the producer side of me lagged behind the writer side of me, and I was told along the way that I wasn't a good enough producer. Like it wasn't good enough, yet—the work wasn't good enough yet.
- Annie:** Oh, wow.
- Jeff:** Like the song is good, but we're gonna have a different producer produce it.
- Annie:** And producing means putting all the instruments together-
- Jeff:** Instruments, vocals. It's like-
- Annie:** So they take all the pieces.
- Jeff:** Yes. The equivalent in film world is like the director of a film, which is sometimes easier for people to understand. But the person who's kind of in charge of the creative vision for that record.
- Annie:** So is it the chef who founds the restaurant or is it the chef who's actually working in the kitchen?
- Jeff:** The chef who's actually working in the kitchen.
- Annie:** Got it. Okay. Okay.
- Jeff:** Which is sometimes the same.
- Annie:** Yeah, yeah, that's it. That's it.
- Jeff:** But I think if there's anything like looking back... And I turned 40, this year too, so it's like a naturally reflective year. And I think looking back, the one thing better than music, but one of the things I think I've done well in my career is just persevere. I think I went from someone who was not a good enough producer. And I see that now. And at the time, that was just hurtful and discouraging, and I didn't understand why. And I just kind of kept working at it.

And along the way, there were some people that gave me opportunities, and "oh, this song sounds great. This song went on the radio. Jeff produced this." And I think the story became Jeff's a really good record producer, not just a good writer who's like an okay producer. I think that's maybe why that one means the most to me-

Annie: Yeah, of course.

Jeff: ...because it's just this affirmation of kind of the slow, bumpy climb, and keeping after something. And I think that's certainly not just true for record production. That's true for anything.

Annie: That's beautiful.

Jeff: I mean, we've talked about that, too. Like, that's been sort of your story. I think that's something you share.

Annie: Yeah, you just keep going.

Jeff: You just keep going.

Annie: You just keep going. That's beautiful, Jeff. Oh, I'm so nervous. I just want you to win nine. I mean, everyone listening... I just can't imagine how everyone's feeling going, "Oh, my gosh." They're about to know in like minutes how many you won and you and I wait a week.

Jeff: Yes.

Annie: Oh, my gosh.

Jeff: You know what? When I told Marisa the day nominations came out, and I told her this—she's the most wonderful woman—she said to me, "That's amazing. I hope you don't lose all nine." And I was like, it's totally possible, though. It's totally possible. That's why this is such a good idea. Because when part two of this kicks in, it could be like lost all nine. And what does that feel like? Who know?

Annie: What do you predict it feels like to lose all nine?

Jeff: I think that will be discouraging. Honestly. I don't think it will be crushing because like I said, the nomination thing and just being included in a group of good things is legitimately what matters most to me. But to go, Wow, we included you in all these groups, more groups than any other nominee and you didn't win any of them, I think that'll feel like, Man, that's tough.

Annie: Is there a world where you... Well, you can't go nine for nine because you're double nominated.

Jeff: I can't go nine for nine.

Annie: The best you can do is six for nine because you're double nominated in three categories. So you could win Song of the Year Producer of the Year, Pop/Contemporary Recorded Song of the Year, Inspirational Song of the Year, Bluegrass and Pop Album. So you can't get nine because you're double nominated-

Jeff: Can't get nine.

Annie: ...but you can get six.

Jeff: Yes.

Annie: What's it gonna feel like if you go six out of six categories?

Jeff: I think that would be really encouraging. I think it would be whatever the 180 of losing all of them would be.

Annie: I think one of the amazing things you do that is really reflected in this, Jeff, is when you sat down with Katy Nicole, when you sat down with Anne Wilson, nobody knew these songs were gonna do this.

Jeff: Yeah, including me.

Annie: And you wrote both those songs that people know every word to and that they're singing across the world. And they're nominated for... It has made these young women's careers, honestly. I would say that if they're sitting there, but I'll happily say it behind their back. I mean, you wrote songs that have given them a career.

Jeff: Sure. I will say we wrote songs that has given-

Annie: Yes, certainly. Certainly. Good. Well said. Why do you work with people nobody knows?

Jeff: Because I've just had enough times in my career where somebody nobody knows becomes somebody people know. I mean, you know, another perfect example of this in That Sounds Fun world is Micah Tyler.

Annie: Yeah. Oh, we love Micah Tyler.

Jeff: I mean, his first song called *Never Been a Moment* it's a song me and him wrote the first morning I met him.

Annie: Wow. And it was the same kind of thing. He just signed his record deal and nobody knew who he was. And he became somebody who people know and whose songs are on the radio. He's a great artist. He was with me last week working on his next thing, which I'm really excited about. But I don't know. I just believe that new voices and new stories are really important to the Christian music market as a whole, but just to the kingdom of God. I think that newness is important.

Anne and Katy, I think one of the reasons they're connecting is what their stories are, and having something different to say than some other people. I don't know, I've always been drawn to that—helping and being a part of. And I love being able to be part of the ground floor with somebody. And I think it creates sometimes deeper relationships. That's just-

Annie: Yeah. Because in Anne's book... we talked about this in her episode. I mean, Anne's book she talks about you, like, this is my brother who will give me any bit of advice that I ever need.

Jeff: And we've become, I think Anne and I mean, Micah and Katie... and there's a number of artists that have become friends in my world that that's how that starts is on the ground floor. Like, I'm a new artist... and I'm new to them. They could have walked into the room and gone, "I don't really connect with Jeff. He's not the person I want to create with," you know?

Annie: Wild. So are new artists... I do not know how *In Jesus Name* and *My Jesus* both happened with you in the room. Not that I don't know how it happened with you in the room. But I just don't know how both those songs happen for those girls at the exact same time. You're in the room for both of them. Is there something about artists who are new that make them write more honestly, before the system knows them?

Jeff: No, no, I don't think it's that. I mean, I really believe it's this God-given thing. I think sometimes there's just ideas. Like when great ideas meet great combinations of people... You know, I say to young songwriters all the time like there's no such thing as a wasted song. You're gonna write bad songs because that's... Songwriting is a lot like baseball, where like, you know, if you hit 3 out of 10, you do a 300 average, you can end up in the Hall of Fame. You know?

Annie: Right. Wow.

Jeff: There's no wasted songs. You're working those muscles all the time. And I've had numerous songs in my career where I felt like the idea literally dropped down from the Lord and my creative muscles were in such good shape that I was able to help the artist execute that idea and not get in the way of it.

Annie: Wow.

Jeff: It's the same thing when you're writing a book I imagine. That you just like... you realize, Oh, my creative stuff, those muscles are in good shape, and I'm able to get something out as opposed to getting in my own way.

Annie: That's right. You throw away a lot of words.

Jeff: Yeah, that's right. And so I think sometimes there's these songs that come along. And I put *Come What May* in that category, too. Just like something that kind of shows up and the people in the room are the right people in the room and that's the right idea and it's the right thing at the right time.

I've been working some with Matthew on his new record recently. And that guy is as connected and honest of songwriters I know. He's been doing this forever.

Annie: That's a great point. He's unbelievable.

Jeff: He's unbelievable. He's unbelievable.

Annie: This may be an exaggeration. I don't care. He's like a once in a generation artist.

Jeff: I mean, yeah. I don't know. I've learned a lot about songwriting when I was on the road with him playing his songs in front of people. What are the kinds of things that an audience really connects with? And just writing with him. I've learned a lot and I'm grateful to get to work with him on music.

Annie: I see so much of how he helps other artists, how he tours, how he songwrites, how he is a part of all the behind-the-scenes. And the other week—I don't think I've seen him since this happened—the other week I helped him with a live stream thing and he sang live. And afterwards I was like, "I forget you have such a good voice."

Jeff: Oh, man.

Annie: Because I see what a businessman and what a creative and what a songwriter he is, I forget what incredible artist he is.

Jeff: Yeah, he's an incredible artist.

Annie: Until he's singing right beside you and you're like, "My gosh."

Jeff: "Oh, this is world class."

Annie: Yes. That's why I'm like, "Oh, he's good at everything." It's unbelievable. Okay, Jeff, any final words before we know how you did?

Jeff: I don't think so. I mean, yeah, it's encouraging to be in this position. It's encouraging for you to have me on to talk about it.

Annie: Oh, it's amazing.

Jeff: I don't know. I'm grateful. We'll find out. We'll see.

Annie: We'll see. Well, I want to say here before we know, I am so proud to be your friend even if you did a job that no one ever gave me an award for.

Jeff: Yeah, thanks.

Annie: I love how you're a husband to my friend. I love how you father two of my friends. I love how you care for people in our city. I love how committed you are to your church. So there are all these things about Jeff Pardo that are award-winning that you don't get nominated for. And so I hope this goes really well. But also, you're a winner as a person.

Jeff: Yeah, thanks.

[00:31:55] <music>

Annie: All right, friends. That is all the conversation Jeff and I had before the Dove Awards. Now, I don't want you to do this. But you could Google or maybe you watched the show when it was live on TV and see if Jeff won and what Jeff won. But if you don't know, neither did I.

In the morning after the Dove Awards at 9 a.m. Jeff sat down in the studio with me and told me how the award show went. And this is that conversation.

[00:32:26] <music>

Annie: Everyone listening, welcome back to Part 2 of-

Jeff: Part 2.

Annie: ...Jeff Pardo interview. Jeff, it is the morning after the Dove Awards and I just want to be clear, I know nothing. I have worked incredibly hard to know nothing. First of all, tell me how... don't tell me if you won on anything. But how was it? How was the Dove Awards?

Jeff: It was great. It was great.

Annie: Were the performances good?

Jeff: Performances were good. It's good to see friends. And I think especially in my... I always call it the chair I sit in. Like we as producers and writers are so isolated from each other just because artists are going and they'll work with me, and then they'll work with my friend Jonathan, then they'll work with Ben. So it's great to be in a room together and just see, you know, different artists and different people that we don't get to see as a community. That's probably the best thing about the whole deal-

Annie: Is seeing everybody.

Jeff: Yeah. You just go... You know, everybody's kind of isolated. Even for artists, like you're on tour. Everybody's in their own little pods. You know what I mean?

Annie: Yeah

Jeff: So it's great to be together.

Annie: It's one of the reasons I love conferences is three speakers are there and an artist. So yes, a couple weeks ago, Phil Wickham and I had like a 20-minute chat because we were just at the same thing. And it was awesome. And I had FOMO about last night because I was like, "All my friends are all together. I didn't go."

Jeff: That's right.

Annie: Okay, here is what I have to know. Did you win a Dove Award?

Jeff: Yes.

Annie: You did. You could have won six.

Jeff: Could have won six.

Annie: How many did you win?

Jeff: I won three.

Annie: Oh my gosh. Okay, you won through. Oh my gosh. Okay, you won three. Okay, what happens next? How do I get you to tell me what's next? Okay, there were nine nominations, you won three. Do you want to tell me which three? Or do I want to look at the paper where you wrote it down? Or do I want to ask?

Jeff: Hey, man, this says That Sounds Fun with Annie F. Downs, not with Jeff Pardo. So you're the boss, man.

Annie: Tell me the first one you won.

Jeff: The first one I won in the night was Inspirational Song of the Year for a song called *God is Good* by Francesca Battistelli. I wrote with her and my friend Ben Glover.

Annie: Wow.

Jeff: Which is a great-

Annie: That's the first one you won.

Jeff: That was the first one. And most of the categories that I was in were all the pre-show. Like they do this like hour-long video thing and they reveal a lot of it. So that was great. That was a good little affirmation for that song because Ben and I and Frannie always felt like it was a really special song. It ended up in this movie that was beautiful.

And then when it went out to the radio and kind of the market at large, it kind of underperformed and a lot of stations didn't get on board with it. We were kind of scratching our heads about it, like, man... It was just like affirmation of the art of the song that people went, "That's a good song." So it was great.

Annie: So was that a pre-show one?

Jeff: That was pre-show?

Annie: That was pre-show. So did you go to pre-show things?

Jeff: Well, the way they did it, basically the show started, I think it was at 6:30, and at 530 they started rolling the pre-telecast video-

Annie: In the big room?

Jeff: Yes, in the big room on the screen.

Annie: Got it.

Jeff: I mean, we were all-

Annie: Already sitting.

Jeff: A lot of us are already there because, you know, a lot of our stuff was before the show.

Annie: Okay, I just have to ask you. Did you win producer of the year?

Jeff: I won Producer of the Year.

Annie: Jeff, oh, my gosh.

Jeff: Unbelievable. Unbelievable. It's unbelievable.

Annie: That is unbelievable.

Jeff: I love how you're tearing up, friend.

Annie: I can't believe it.

Jeff: I can't either.

Annie: What did you do?

Jeff: I sat there and smiled while a lot of people turned around and clapped for me. Just there in my community of people. It was beautiful

Annie: Was it pre-show or it was in the room?

Jeff: It was pre-show. It was the last award of the pre-show.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Jeff: It was... it was... it was... I mean, anybody who's listening on the podcast is just like, "That guy doesn't know how to speak very well right now." But yeah, it was really beautiful.

Annie: Producer of the Year.

Jeff: Yeah.

Annie: So everybody lost their minds?

Jeff: I mean, Matthew and Anne were up there and just other artists and friends. And everybody was just... I could tell I was, you know... And my phone started blowing up.

Annie: Because everybody's in the room.

Jeff: Everybody's in the room. It was really affirming. You know what I mean? It was really beautiful.

Annie: Oh my gosh. But you didn't get to give a speech.

Jeff: Not in the thing. The people who won things for the pre-show, they took you backstage and they had this little thing for the TV broadcast. They were editing in acceptance speeches for the people who won.

Annie: Oh, got it. Got it.

Jeff: So when they broadcast it, I think... well, yeah, I mean, they'll edit in... They're gonna re-air the pre-telecast with those speeches edited. So I got to say a couple things.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Jeff: Yeah, it was great. It was really cool.

Annie: Producer of the Year. That was the one on the list that you were the only name on the whole thing. Producer of the year. What did Marisa do?

Jeff: Oh, she just... I mean, she pulled out her camera because she wanted to record it and they were like, "Don't ever record." So she got this quick little video. And I'll say this too since Katy Nicole is a friend of the podcast.

Annie: Yeah.

Jeff: The pre-telecast was Katie and DOE that we're doing all the awards. So I saw Katy two weeks ago, we were working on a record and she knew.

- Annie:** Oh my gosh, she knew this because they had already recorded it?
- Jeff:** She knew because they already filmed it.
- Annie:** Holy cow!
- Jeff:** So she was one of the first people I texted.
- Annie:** Oh, sure.
- Jeff:** Because I was like, "You knew this was happening."
- Annie:** "How did you do that?"
- Jeff:** And she replied immediately and was just like, "Yes, yes. Yes. Yes. I'm so happy for you." Anyway, it was really beautiful. I'm really grateful.
- Annie:** Who do you remember in that moment locking eyes with? Matthew?
- Jeff:** Yeah, Matthew. He was sitting two rows up and my friend Darren Mulligan who was just over to my left a little bit. I mean, you know... And Marisa.
- Annie:** Jeff, Producer of the Year.
- Jeff:** Yeah.
- Annie:** Oh, my gosh. Oh, my gosh. Oh, my gosh. Okay, so the third one was in the telecast?
- Jeff:** Was in the telecast.
- Annie:** Okay, what's the third one you won?
- Jeff:** Anne and me and Matthew won for Pop/Contemporary Song of the Year for *My Jesus*.
- Annie:** Okay, which was one of the last awards of the night after... And Anne also won New Artist of the Year, which was so beautiful.
- Annie:** Oh, I'm so glad. Of course, she did.
- Jeff:** I clapped and shouted more for than I did for anything else probably.

Annie: I mean, the GMA posted this Instagram post of slides of all the new artists of the year doing a showcase. And I was like, "Anna is in this group. She's a new artist?"

Jeff: She's a new artist.

Annie: I'm so glad she won that. Unbelievable.

Jeff: Unbelievable.

Annie: I mean, you won 50% of the awards you're nominated for.

Jeff: Yeah.

Annie: That is insane.

Jeff: I was entirely emotionally prepared to come in here and be like, "I didn't win anything," and it still would have been a good night. So yeah, I'm still... I'm not speaking very eloquently because it's kind of like-

Annie: It's so genuine.

Jeff: ...man, I don't know how that happened.

Annie: It was 12 hours ago, dude. So you don't have to have all the answers.

Jeff: Right. You're right. It was 12 hours ago.

Annie: And you slept the majority of those. So you do not have to have all the answers. Winning for songs versus album, does it matter?

Jeff: No.

Annie: Okay.

Jeff: Not for me.

Annie: Not to me either. I mean, three Doves in one night. The thing I'm sad I didn't see is everyone else respond to you winning because you're just so beloved across the industry that I bet the Phil Wickams of the world and, you know, all of our pals, I bet everybody just lost their mind when you got Producer of the Year.

Jeff: Yeah, it was cool. And even just after the show at a little after party that I went to, it was just, you know, seeing Crowder and seeing Toby both who had really kind things to say to me. I don't know, it was just a really good community affirmation.

Annie: Talk a little bit about the after-parties. I mean, you don't have to name-drop or whatever. But that's one of the like everybody's in town and you're supposed to go to an after party.

Jeff: Well, yeah, I mean, I think that's what it is. It's just everybody's here. Again, there's not a whole lot of opportunities where people that I work with from, you know, a record label and artists and you're all in the same room. And that happens once a year.

Annie: And who throws them? Touring companies or record labels or management?

Jeff: Different people. The one I went to was thrown by Capitol Christian Music who is my publisher. And so it was a lot of Capitol artists, writers, and label people and managers.

Annie: And do most people get between multiple ones, like, "I'm gonna go to my record labels, and then I'm gonna go to my management"?

Jeff: I bet some people do. And just not me. We were there for maybe 45 minutes or an hour, and then it was like, "Wow, there's a lot of people here. Our son was gonna get up at 6:05?"

Annie: Oh, yeah. Where was the party? Was it somewhere fun?

Jeff: It was at the W downtown. The new W Hotel in the kind of rooftop. I mean, it wasn't outside but the roof-

Annie: Because it was negative 100 degrees.

Jeff: It was very cold.

Annie: It was so cold. You're Chicago.

Jeff: I know. Well, I'm Chicago but I've lived here for 22 years. So I'm more of a wimp than I used to be.

Annie: Oh, man. So you just walk into the Capitol party and everybody's like, "Freaking Jeff Pardo for Producer of the Year."

Jeff: It was cool. I mean, just sitting there with my publisher, my friend Carrie, who has been such a supporter for a long time and Brad, who runs the label. And I don't know. You know, again, I mean, I just feel affirmed is the word I keep thinking of. Just affirmation from my community who I respect and who's full of really talented people who I get to collaborate with. So it was a beautiful night.

Annie: So what we discussed days ago that our friends heard minutes ago is you said... you talked a little about how it would affect your work going forward, whether you win or lose. Now that you're on the winning side of some of these, do you predict it affecting your work differently than you thought?

Jeff: I don't know. I mean, like I said minutes ago for our friends listening, I think it doesn't hurt. It's wonderful to be publicly affirmed for some things. I mean, even this morning, I was texting with the guy who works at a record label who's a dear friend of mine, and he was just like, "Man, this is awesome. And back to work."

Annie: That's it.

Jeff: Because all I can ever control is not the success, it's not the result, it's none of that. The part that I think I'm responsible for is the work. Show up and serve the artists or serve the song or serve the band who am recording... whatever it is. That's the part that I can control.

So today I'm going to walk out of here with you and I'm going to go back to my studio and work on a song that I got feedback on yesterday that needs some work that isn't quite right yet. And that's my job.

Annie: And that's my song, dear everybody. So we got some feedback. You're like, tried out the voice. Everything's great except Annie is singing.

Jeff: The Annie record song were... one of the songs were pretty they're on but songs they need some work.

Annie: Listen, with as many artists are writing books, I think I need to turn the tables.

Jeff: Yes.

Annie: Right?

Jeff: Where's the Annie record?

Annie: Where's the Annie record?

Jeff: Come on.

Annie: CAIN and I talked about me writing a song with them. I just need to really say it to them.

Jeff: You should do it.

Annie: I should do it. They're all coming in over here. I wanna go over there.

Jeff: Everybody would want to listen to that song.

Annie: Not me singing. But it would be fun.

Jeff: Listen, well, maybe you should sing.

Annie: I'm a great Alto too. Do you know that about me?

Jeff: Come on?

Annie: Bring me in that low alto or that high tenor. I am the-

Jeff: The high tenor.

Annie: I can find a harmony. Listen-

Jeff: You know, altos are underloved, underappreciated.

Annie: Thank you.

Jeff: If you got a choir, you mute the alto, it's like, "What happened?"

Annie: Yes, that's right. It feels like it loses its-

Jeff: All the fullness went away.

Annie: That's exactly right. That's how I feel too. Okay, let me think what else I need to know. Anybody win last night that you were just like...? Anne. You were just over the moon for Anne.

Jeff: Was over the moon for Anne?

Annie: Was she excited?

- Jeff:** She was so excited. She was so excited. And also was able to honor her... And in her performance she did this, but like-
- Annie:** Did she sing *My Jesus*?
- Jeff:** Sang *My Jesus*. And then she had a great moment where Brooke Ligertwood came on stage with her and they sang part of *What a Beautiful Name*, which has a significant part in Anne's story.
- Annie:** Yeah, that's right. That's how it all started.
- Jeff:** So that was beautiful. And Anne was over the moon that Brooke agreed to do that. It was beautiful. So I was so happy for her. And she was able to kind of honor her brother that she lost in her speeches. Then I'll say too Cece Winans won a few things last night.
- Annie:** Oh, yeah. That's the one someone told me. Someone said Cece won Artists of the Year or something.
- Jeff:** Man! And just like gracious-
- Annie:** I mean, when's the last time she won a Dove Award?
- Jeff:** I don't know. I don't know. It might be more recent than I think. But she had a big year this year and it's someone who hasn't been in the market in the same way for a few years. And *Believe For It*, that song won Song of the Year.
- Annie:** Did it?
- Jeff:** Yes. And it's great.
- Annie:** Wow.
- Jeff:** My friends Kyle and Dwan and Mitch wrote that song with Cece. So it was great.
- Annie:** We gotta get Dwan on here.
- Jeff:** You gotta get to Dwan.
- Annie:** I love him so much.
- Jeff:** Come on, Dwan.

Annie: You know he's the worship pastor at Cross Point now?

Jeff: I do.

Annie: So he is making some moves for us at church. He's awesome.

Jeff: He's a wonderful human who's full of the spirit.

Annie: Have you been part of this choir thing he's doing, The Choir Room?

Jeff: Well, no, but I've been watching the Instagram because I think it's so good.

Annie: It's so cool. For friends listening, it's just this thing Dwan does in Nashville, where he's like, if y'all want to come learn these four parts, we're just gonna sing.

Jeff: Just gonna sing.

Annie: And there's like hundreds of people that show up and it's beautiful.

Jeff: It's beautiful.

Annie: Okay, Dwan won for Song of the Year.

Jeff: Dwan won for Song of the Year.

Annie: That's great.

Jeff: But yeah, I think it's just great... Like, even just thinking about the Kingdom of God as a whole where the entertainment business is and this is true for Christian music too sometimes, we really value... Sometimes youth is overvalued I think. And it's great when people who are older and have been doing it a long time are then reaffirmed by the community.

Annie: Yes, yes, yes.

Jeff: Seeing Toby perform last night, which was awesome... His song called *The Goodness* is one of my favorite songs of the year.

Annie: His new album.

Jeff: It's great. He's so good.

Annie: Did he win anything for it? I bet it's too young.

Jeff: It's too young. I bet he'll win a bunch of them next year.

Annie: He'll just win next year.

Jeff: Youth is not bad, but neither is age and wisdom, and experience. And I think-

Annie: And perseverance.

Jeff: Yeah. So I like when artists who have been doing it a long time, like I said, kind of get reaffirmed and go like, Man, yeah, that's a piece of work you made was great. Anyway, so that stood out to me—that Cece thing for sure.

Annie: Who did win Pop/Contemporary Album if not CAIN or Anne?

Jeff: for KING & COUNTRY.

Annie: Always.

Jeff: They're really good. They made a good record. They won for a couple of Video Awards, too, which were-

Annie: Which they do... And Saint.

Jeff: Yeah.

Annie: They're incredible.

Jeff: They're really good.

Annie: I love them. I'm so glad. I love when they win. They are so gracious in their speeches and very thoughtful. They're one to ones that have done this long enough that they go, "It's okay if we don't win, but if we do, here's what we're going to say and what matters." I feel like Joel does it well, but Luke feels like just a preacher.

Jeff: A well of wisdom.

Annie: Yes.

Jeff: And they're really intentional about the art they make and the way their records and their shows. I think there's a lot in there intentionality that all artists can learn from and I can learn from.

Annie: Did CAIN win anything?

Jeff: CAIN did not win anything.

Annie: Okay. They're still the most wonderful.

Jeff: Oh, gosh.

Annie: I adore them so much.

Jeff: That's it. And I said this, again, 15 minutes ago for our listeners. Even on the other side of winning a few things, I really do think—and I can say this even more authoritatively now—that there is a reality to being nominated that's actually maybe still the most affirming thing. That out of a sea of things, a group of people went, "These are the five we're gonna..."

And then at the point where it's like, "Well, out of five we're going to choose one." Again, I'm really grateful. It's super encouraging to win something like Producer of the Year-

Annie: Yes. Oh my gosh.

Jeff: ...but I think still the bigger thing is like you're in this subgroup that was narrowed down. You know what I mean?

Annie: I felt that about my Klove I've lost. To go like, "Of all the books that came out that year, I was one of the five.

Jeff: 100%.

Annie: And of all the podcasts in the world? And the first time you've ever had that award available, this was one of the five? That's unbelievable.

Jeff: It's unbelievable.

Annie: That's unbelievable.

Jeff: And of course you want to win. All that stuff can still be true.

Annie: That's right.

Jeff: But like in terms of how does it influence the work you do going forward, it's like-

Annie: Losing didn't make me stop. Neither winning would have made me go, "Well, then I should do an extra one every week."

Jeff: Yeah. It's just like, man, apparently... And you know, it's like we as creatives are constantly criticizing ourselves and wondering if we're any good at all. And moments where a community of artistic people kind of affirm, "Oh, you're one of these five things," it's the shot in the arm that makes you go, "Okay, then let's go fight the battle again."

Annie: Yes, yeah.

Jeff: "I wonder if this book I'm writing on is any good." Or go fix a song. Like I said, Well, I'm about to go fix a song for the first version of what I turned in, the person at the label I work with, and he was totally right, was like, "Hmm, this needs... This isn't quite right yet." But it's like, okay, go do the work.

Annie: Gosh, that's awesome. Jeff, I can't believe it and I cannot believe it. Producer of the Year.

Jeff: Yeah.

Annie: How do we title the podcast because now I can't say "Producer of the Year: Jeff Pardo" because then it'll be a spoiler alert.

Jeff: I don't know.

Annie: We're gonna have to kind of say, Jeff Pardo and what could have happened at the Doves.

Jeff: There you go.

Annie: And then it'll be-

Jeff: Producer of the Year, question mark.

Annie: And then by the time we get here, everyone's like, "Exclamation point.

Jeff: Exclamation point.

Annie: He is the producer of the year. Oh, what a dream, man! Thank you for inviting us into this - on both sides of that. That was really vulnerable and genuine of you to let us hear you before and make the deal to hear you after without knowing. And you

won some and you lost some. So you're showing up fully. I'm happy for Frannie, I'm happy for Anne, and for you. Dude.

Jeff: Thanks, friend.

Annie: Producer of the year.

Jeff: So good.

Annie: Let's get back to work.

Jeff: Back to work.

Annie: Keep making it. We'll do it again.

[00:50:52] <music>

Outro: Oh, friends! Wasn't that the most fun? Can you believe it? Jeff is the best. He is the producer of the year. Three Dove Awards. It's absolutely incredible. Listen, our whole team was so moved by the whole experience. We just loved having him in here. Jeff was so honest and thoughtful and vulnerable with us.

I don't know that we've ever gotten to do a show... We haven't ever done a show like this, where we had such a reveal on the pod. It was awesome. So hey, be sure to follow Jeff on social media. He's on Instagram. Tell him all the congratulations and tell him how much we love him.

And listen also, I learned a ton in this conversation about what perseverance looks like, what commitment looks like. I'm just blown away by Jeff Pardo. What an absolute hero! What a great dude!

Okay, if you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Smiling ear to ear cheering for my friend Jeff. I'm Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook. All the places you may need me, that's how you can find me.

And I think that's it for me today, friends. I'm just the happiest. Y'all go out or stay home, do something that sounds fun to you. I will do the same. Today what sounds fun to me is knowing that you are going to congratulate our friend Jeff. I cannot wait to see what his internet looks like today when y'all say hi to him and congratulate him on all the wins.

Y'all have a great day. Have a great weekend. We will see you back here on Monday with one of our favorite Broadway stars, Double Name Witches, and now a Hallmark movie star. Ginna Claire Mason Moffat is here on Monday for a special Halloween show that is mostly about Hallmark Christmas movies. Y'all have a great weekend. Congratulations, Jeff Pardo. We will y'all on Monday.