



>> SOMETHING TO **rock** ABOUT
MercyMe

- >> Smile, It's HAWK NELSON (Again!)
- >> SHAWN McDONALD'S Free Thinking
- + SANCTUS REAL KJ-52 BRIAN LITRELL

42 Free to Sing

Back with a release that is more akin to an overall experience than a single-loaded CD, SHAWN McDONALD returns with an artful expression far different from his first. CHRISTA A. BANISTER lets us in on the inspiration behind *Ripen*.

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28 Breathing Room

While much of MercyMe's legacy has been defined by loss, pain and perseverance, the band is grateful to be in a new and different season. **BEAU BLACK** takes an inside look at lessons learned, realities faced and the new, edgier album that everyone is talking about.

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You gave Hawk Nelson lots of love in our Readers' Choice Awards earlier this year. Now, critics are saying their sophomore release far surpasses the first. Frankly, these guys are on fire. **DAVID MCCREARY** weighs in on your favorite Canadian band.

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When so many Christians are afraid to admit that not everything in their world is alright, the guys of Sanctus Real are sharing their most honest album to date. **BRIAN QUINCY NEWCOMB** leads CCM readers down a road of grief and sorrow, along with Sanctus, to reveal the unique honesty behind its new release.

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What do Eminem, Napoleon Dynamite and Jesus all have in common? All three can be found within the lyrics of KJ-52's music. Now, with a remix album hitting shelves this month, this guy continues to deliver the goods. **GREG RUMBURG** has KJ on the record.

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State of the Chart

Did you happen to notice the unintended irony of the two previous "From the Editor" columns as they appeared in our March and April issues? I can't remember the last time one—much less two—of my editorials stirred so much discussion among fans on the internet and in my conversations with industry colleagues. (At the very least, it's nice to know this page is...well, read.)

The fun kicked off when I announced in CCM's March issue that we were going to respond immediately to our subscribers' survey results by increasing our coverage of rock & roll as our readers so clearly desire. I explained that while we will continue to cover all genres of modern Christian music, rock—in all its forms—will grace CCM's pages more than ever.

So, given the new direction of the magazine, what did I use this editor's page for the following month? I did what any editor championing rock & roll would do—I made an impassioned plea to *save pop!*

Did I mention irony?

While the timing couldn't have been more pronounced, in hindsight I'm really pleased it happened that way. Why? It sent a message. Yes, we at CCM are excited to cover more rock music than ever; but this magazine has been and always will be an advocate for stylistic diversity. And while we will raise high the flag of rock & roll, we will also consistently champion "underdog" genres such as hip-hop and AC pop.

With this month's issue, we are pleased to unveil one new way we will be doing this. For quite some time our readers have expressed a strong interest in seeing album sales charts return to the magazine. And thanks to a new agreement with Nielsen SoundScan, CCM will now feature several Christian album sales charts in each issue. (See our new "Hitlist" section beginning on page 14.) Not only are we including a primary chart highlighting the Top 40 best-selling "Christian" albums of all styles

combined, but we're also featuring four sub-genre charts. Of course we'll spotlight the two genres our readers have indicated they're most interested in via rock and praise & worship charts. In addition, breakout charts will track the Top 20 best-selling albums in both the R&B/hip-hop and AC pop categories. (Each chart will reflect album sales at both Christian and general market stores combined for the week prior to each month's publishing deadline.)

If you're one of the many fans who enjoys dissecting album sales charts, you'll no doubt occasionally notice an entry or genre classification that you find peculiar. One of the most well-known in our industry is the *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* soundtrack. Why is it on the Christian charts?

Simply put, the popular recording is distributed to Christian retail stores as well as general market outlets. The same goes for the new album by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. While Nielsen's inclusion of this disc might leave you scratching your head—and, if you're like me, squirming in your chair—the album is distributed nationally to the Christian bookstore market. There are other curiosities as well. Consider the latest albums by Plumb and Rebecca St. James.

While you and I might view both of them as rock albums, the artists' record labels and Nielsen have agreed to categorize them as AC pop. (Hey, we don't make the rules.)

So, all you chartheads, buckle up and let the fun begin.



Jay@CCMmagazine.com

CCM MAGAZINE

Your Christian Music Magazine Since 1978
volume 28 issue 11

For those whose lives are strengthened through faith-informed music, CCM Magazine goes behind the scenes to celebrate the artistry of Christian music.

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THE FUTURE OF CCM

I love CCM Magazine and have been a subscriber for probably 15 years or more. I was so excited to see you mention in the last issue that the readers overwhelmingly favor rock & roll music ["From the Editor," March]. I was even more excited to read that you plan on meeting that demand. Here's my question: Why hasn't Christian radio figured this out? They seem stuck on the pop stuff and refuse to move to rock. I don't get it. There are some Christian radio stations in the country that have moved on to more of a rock format. Way-FM in Grand Rapids, Mich., which is not affiliated with the Way-FM network out of Nashville, is one example. Also, Radio U in Columbus, Ohio, plays great music, as do many stations on the Internet. But it seems that the majority of Christian radio still hasn't discovered what you recently discovered—that the rock format is the more popular format. I think it would be a great thing if you at CCM could have some influence in that area. Thanks again for everything you do!

**Carl Crispin,
Boca Raton, FL**

I was thrilled to read of your decision to include more rock in your magazine. As a 16-year-old punk/alternative/hardcore/anything-close-to-it fanatic, the articles about mewithoutYou, The Fold and P.O.D. made my day. Can't wait to see who else you cover! Also, Chris Well's bit on "If Secular Bands Got Saved" was hilarious [List-O-Rama]. Might I also suggest: The Rolling Stones=The Rolled-Away Stone and Led Zeppelin=Led to Believin'.

**Hannah Roberts,
Margate, FL**

ON THE OTHER HAND...

I never have written to CCM before, but I felt that I should make the time to pose a comment. I have been a subscriber for many years, and, within the past year, I have been very disappointed with CCM. I am a huge Christian music fan and have been for years. Some of my favorites include Steven Curtis Chapman, FFH and Avalon. Why is it that these groups are never covered, and all I see is all the hard-core bands? I am not a fan of these at all. Some of these groups to me seem just like they are out of the secular music groups. I have heard their music, too, and, to me, it is not Christ-like at all. We as Christians are called to be different than the world. Why would the world want anything to do with us if we are just like them? We have to show them that there is a better way. Some of these groups do not show the Light of Jesus at all. Please take what I have said to heart, and start covering these other groups. I do not say it to be mean but to show you the difference. It is time for us as Christians to take a stand and to stop following the crowd and taking the easy way out and the path most followed.

Heather Snyder, via e-mail

HOME ON MAY 2

I am a CCM subscriber, and I enjoy reading your magazine every month. I would like to inform you of a new voice in Christian music. As you are probably aware, Brian Littrell (of Backstreet Boys fame) will be releasing his first Christian

contemporary album, *Welcome Home*, on May 2. The reason I wanted to tell you is because I thought it would be the perfect opportunity to put Brian on the cover. I know it would mean a lot to me and lots of other people as well. Brian has made a huge difference in my life, and I am so excited he is doing a Christian album. Thank you for your consideration.

Megan Riley, via e-mail

Thanks for your note, Megan. You'll be pleased to know this month's lead review highlights Brian Littrell's new album. (Check it out on page 49.) And we've got more Littrell coverage coming in our next issue, so stay tuned...

DUDE, WHERE'S THEIR BUS?

Dudes, awesome Insider feature on mewithoutYou ["8 Things You Should Know About mewithoutYou," March]. It was pretty rad. I was most interested in the way the band converted its bus' diesel engine to a vegetable oil-powered one. What an amazing way to keep the wallet fat and the ozone happy. I had heard about mewithoutYou before, but you guys re-exposed them to me. Thanks. After reading it through, I started to notice how well structured and creative your magazine truly is. Hey, you guys should do a cover of Sufjan Stevens soon. He's wicked sweet and displays musical talent throughout a myriad of instruments. Thanks for lending me your ears. Keep on keeping on. Yey. Woo. writingtoYou,

**Kyle Campbell,
Macomb, MI**



KEVIN YOUNG (DISCIPLE)

A GRACIOUS DISCIPLE

In the April issue of CCM, there is a mistake with the picture for one of the interviews. Page 15 has the "5 Questions with Kevin Young of Disciple" but the bassist, Joey Fife, is pictured. I love the magazine and God Bless.

Brittany Bergens, via email

[Gulp.] Color us embarrassed and apologetic.

I ♥ FLYLEAF

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! Thank you so much for your article on Flyleaf ["Surprised by Joy," February]! They are one of my favorite bands, and I never would've gotten into them if not for your magazine. I had heard them on a college radio station and wasn't too sure about them. When I saw them in your magazine, I bought their CD and fell in love. Lacey is my hero; and since I am only 13, it's hard to believe that someone my age could go through that. It really makes me appreciate my life. I respect and love her band. Thanks again!

**Amber B.,
Canal Fulton, OH**



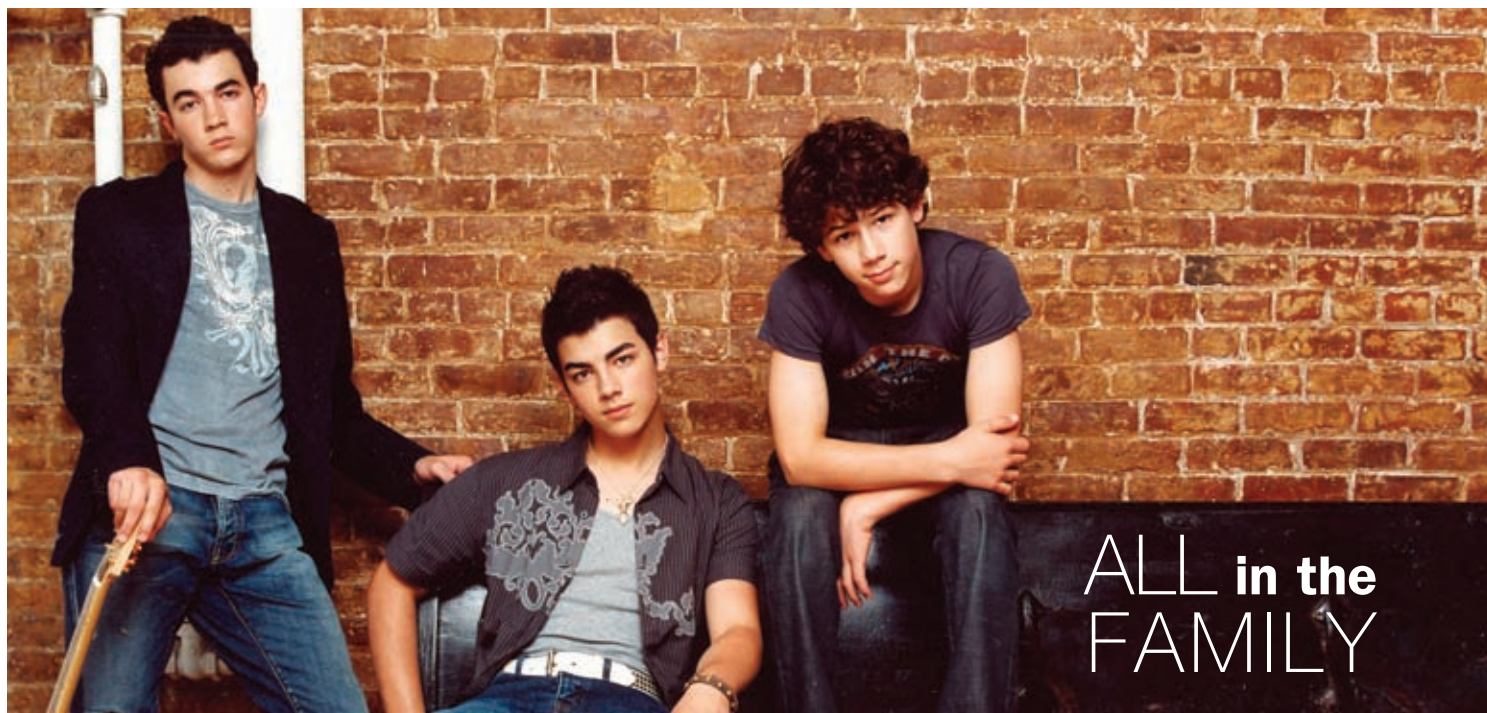
FLYLEAF

We welcome your comments. Address your letter to Feedback, CCM Magazine, 104 Woodmont Blvd., Suite 300, Nashville, TN 37205; fax 615/385-4412, Attn: Feedback, or e-mail feedback@ccmmagazine.com. Always include your full name, address and phone number. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.



insider

Martha Munizzi 101, Michael Card's new endeavor and more



ALL in the FAMILY

Though their debut album, *It's About Time*, doesn't release until May 2, people have been talking about the **JONAS BROTHERS** for months, including coverage in everything from *Teen Vogue* to *Teen People* to *Billboard*. And their good looks and great hooks are combined in the three different episodes [versions] of their first music videos for lead single "Mandy," which were strategically premiered in recent weeks during special appearances on MTV's "TRL." To boot, the song "Time for Me to Fly" is currently featured on the soundtrack—and during the closing credits—of the major motion picture *Aquamarine*. So what's the buzz all about?

THE JACKSON 5. HANSON. Boy bands...family bands. Add the **JONAS BROTHERS** to this impressive group. And what do the brothers themselves think of keeping such company? They couldn't feel more honored! "They're great," Kevin Jonas notes. "They've sold millions of records, and they're just amazing artists—great, very talented."

The Jonas Brothers are poised to become the next mega-selling "family" act. And even though you might consider them young (Kevin, 17; Joseph, 16; and Nicholas, 13), this group has not been an overnight success. In fact, the brothers have all been following musical and theatrical pursuits since they were wee lads. Kevin and Joseph both started their careers as child actors in national commercial campaigns; then along came Nicholas, who caught the ear of Broadway directors at casting calls up and down the Great White Way. Having starred in productions from *Les Miserables* to *The Lion King*, Nicholas became a staple on the Broadway circuit. Then, pretty much by accident during an audition for a part in a musical which called for another, slightly older boy, big brother Joseph was "discovered" and soon took his own bite out of the Big Apple. During this time, the eldest Jonas Brother, Kevin, picked up the guitar one day when he became a bit bored while home sick from school. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Originally, Nicholas planned on signing a solo recording deal and putting out his own project. However, the brothers often wrote songs and performed together, displaying those innate harmonies only to be found amongst siblings; and, soon, the brothers—as a group—caught the attention of the head of Columbia Records. Thus, the "Jonas Brothers" was birthed...much to the delight of young girls everywhere.

On the surface, the unifying theme behind *It's About Time* appears to be, well...time, with many songs featuring that motif. However, "It's About Time should be *It's About Mandy*," jokes Nicholas. To that end, Joseph's favorite cut, "Underdog," is "about a girl who doesn't have many friends in school, and everybody picks on her. But, watch out, 'cause one day she might change the world," he explains. "It's actually about one of our best friends, so we always know that one day this girl is going to make something amazing happen. She's going to influence a lot of people." And the girl? It's actually Mandy (pictured below with the band), who is the inspiration behind several tracks on the record, including, obviously, "Mandy."



When asked why they do what they do, Kevin responds, citing feedback from one fan who told the guys that, in the midst of one of her worst days, she listened to several Jonas Brothers songs and wasn't surprised when a smile spread across her face. As Kevin says, "That's why we do this—to take you [the listener] from a place of sadness to joy. And we're doing it knowing that God is our backing for that, and our beliefs and our Christianity. But they [listeners] don't [always] know that, so when we do express that and when we do share that, they're like, 'That's what was different. That's why I listen to your CD...And that's great to hear, encouraging to hear!'" After all, it's all about making a difference, one song at a time.

KRISTI HENSON



>>> **MUNIZZI REFLECTS ON HER UNUSUAL HISTORY AND HER PROMISING FUTURE.**

To hear gospel/worship artist **MARTHA MUNIZZI** sing, one wouldn't expect to see a Southern blonde on the album cover. The contemporary and traditional gospel mixed with praise and worship that Munizzi writes and shares in churches and at conferences is not even a style she would have expected from herself. "I was raised around Southern gospel," says Munizzi, "but then I met my husband and heard about Andrae Crouch and other contemporary music that he knew about."

Traveling with her preacher father, musical mother and siblings since birth, Munizzi was born for the role of worship leader/artist/wife/mother on the road. At 16, she met her future husband, Dan, when she and her two sisters joined a worship band. And shortly after Martha finished high school, she and Dan married and became music directors for a new, multi-ethnic congregation in Orlando, Fla.

It was there that Martha Munizzi discovered the music that fit. "We had to find a sound that fit the church, find what motivated me to worship and what motivated these people to worship." Inspired by **FRED HAMMOND**, **CECE WINANS** and "choir musicians" like **JOHN P. KEE**, the Munizzis taught such songs to their church and found that people "went crazy over them."

Ten original songs from those days became Munizzi's first album, *Say the*

Name, which birthed the hit "Because of Who You Are." As Munizzi toured, the album sold so well that two more independently distributed projects followed. Recorded at Lakewood Church in Houston, 2003's *The Best Is Yet to Come* became her breakthrough album. She then released her Christmas album, *When He Came*, in 2004 and made history at the Stellar Awards in 2006, becoming the first non-African-American to win an award when she was named "New Artist of the Year."

Only weeks before Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast last year, Munizzi recorded her new project, *No Limits*, in partnership with Integrity Music, in Baton Rouge, La. "One message [on the album] is about tearing walls down. We should believe God for the best, for what He has for us all. Psalm 8:2 says, 'From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise...' Strength is the word for praise there. Praise has the power. As we worship God, we don't have to beg Him and hope that He does it—it's already done."

With growing success including album sales and accolades, Munizzi simply hopes that folks reflect on something else when they hear her name. "I want them to think of someone who is a worshiper and inspires worship in others, a person who ministers and encourages them where they are."

JACKIE A. CHAPMAN

ARE WE MISSING SOMETHING IMPORTANT? APPARENTLY SO. AND MICHAEL CARD'S NEW ALBUM IS HERE TO HELP...

Some 25 years into his career, **MICHAEL CARD** has become a sort of one-man cottage industry, constantly offering up depth, artistic integrity and a compassionate voice to any with ears to hear. Card still performs roughly 80 concerts per year and continues to release amazing music. In the case of his latest Discovery House release, *The Hidden Face of God*, his recent work is clearly some of his best.

On his way toward a call to teach, Michael Card accidentally became one of the most important voices in Christian music in the early 1980s. He wrote songs that became hits for **AMY GRANT** and others, and he released numerous genre-defining albums and collections of his own. Eventually his highly literate songs and teaching spirit were tapped by various publishers; and Card became the author of over a dozen books and countless articles for magazines, including his monthly Bible study, "Living the Message," in *CCM*. Speaking and teaching invitations followed. In 2002, he launched a weekly radio show on the Moody Radio Network called "In the Studio" (currently available as a podcast at MichaelCard.com).

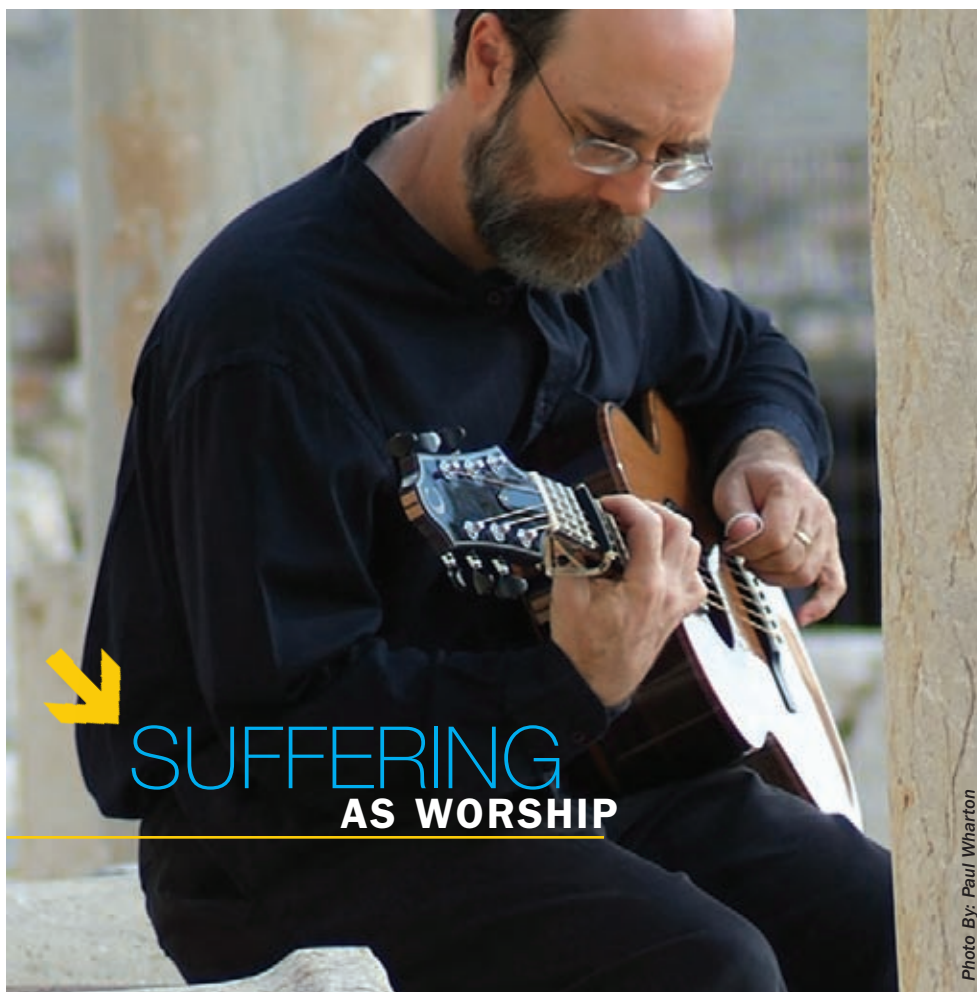
Following the disasters of September 11, Card received a postcard from noted author and frequent correspondent Calvin Seerveld (*Rainbows for the Fallen World*) that simply stated, "See, you have no songs to sing." Card was struck with the simple fact that the Christian community was empty when it came to songs of lament. "They played 'Amazing Grace' on bagpipes, and that was basically it," Card explains. "There wasn't music that really took suffering seriously, at least not in Christian music." He immediately began working through the lament literature in the Bible in order to come to some kind of understanding of a biblical approach to suffering. The result was the book *A Sacred Sorrow*, which was followed last month by the release of his latest album, *The Hidden Face of God*.

The music, a delicate combination of blues, spirituals, jazz and folk, fits the theme of the record perfectly, and sees Card stretching himself as a writer and as a musician. Fans of American music will appreciate the understated elegance of Card's repertoire and the proficiency he exhibits on guitar and banjo.

When it comes to the study of suffering and pain, Card knows the need is universal. "No one has *not* suffered," he insists. "The first thing you do to show you are alive is you cry."

JOHN J. THOMPSON

For more information visit MichaelCard.com.



**SUFFERING
AS WORSHIP**

Photo By: Paul Wharton



**GALA
GRANT**

>>> **NATALIE GRANT** was a featured performer and presenter at the 14th Annual MOVIEGUIDE Faith & Values Awards Gala, held in Los Angeles. Grant presented a special "Lifetime Faith & Values Award" to **PAT BOONE**. Pictured, following the ceremony, are (l-r) Grant's husband, Bernie Herms; Grant; Boone; and Debby Boone. The evening's big winners included *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the WB's "7th Heaven" and ABC's "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition."



MAY

Keep track of upcoming artists' birthdays, **key concert dates**, **events**, **HOLIDAYS**, and other seasonal fun right here each month.

mon. 1	Shelley Breen (Point of Grace)	tues. 16	NEEDTOBREATHE (Ft. Wayne, IN)
tues. 2	Sanctus Real (Roswell, NM)	wed. 17	Nic Gonzales (Salvador) P.O.D. & Pillar (Los Angeles, CA)
wed. 3	Shane & Shane and Bethany Dillon (Greenland, NH)	thurs. 18	4HIM Encore Tour (Little Rock, AR)
thurs. 4	Randy Travis Maylene and the Sons of Disaster (Atlanta, GA)	fri. 19	Cherie Adams Project 86 (Anaheim, CA)
fri. 5	MercyMe (Wichita, KS) Derek Webb & Sandra McCracken (Columbia, SC)	sat. 20	Rock the Coast featuring Kutless & The Afters (Muskegon, MI)
sat. 6	Casting Crowns & Nichole Nordeman (Agawam, MA)	sun. 21	Flyleaf (Denver, CO)
sun. 7	Trent Monk (Monk & Neagle) Kutless (Kodak, TN)	mon. 22	Watermark (Somerset, KY)
mon. 8	Brian Miller (Staple) Rebecca St. James (Albuquerque, NM)	tues. 23	Point of Grace (Midland, MI)
tues. 9	Caedmon's Call (Redlands, CA)	wed. 24	Sarah Kelly (National Anthem, L.A. Dodgers Game, Los Angeles, CA)
wed. 10	Jars of Clay (Holland, MI)	thurs. 25	Kids in the Way (Bakersfield, CA)
thurs. 11	Todd Agnew & Big Daddy Weave (West Des Moines, IA)	fri. 26	Spirit West Coast (Del Mar, CA)
fri. 12	Cornerstone FL featuring David Crowder Band, Relient K & Underoath (Orlando, FL)	sat. 27	Avalon (Medford, MA) Chris Tomlin (Edmonton, Alberta)
sat. 13	Preston Dalton (Dalton) Shane & Shane and Bethany Dillon (Cullman, AL)	sun. 28	Cody Pellerin (Stellar Kart)
sun. 14	MOTHER'S DAY Brandon Johnson (Hundred Year Storm) Cindy Morgan (El Dorado Hills, CA)	mon. 29	MEMORIAL DAY
mon. 15	Underoath (New Orleans, LA)	tues. 30 wed. 31	John Schofield (The Myriad) Amber Ross (Everlife)



fanfare

THE FACE OF LOVE



SANCTUS REAL front man **MATT HAMMITT** and his wife, Sarah, welcomed their first child, **Emmerson Mae Hammitt**, February 23. Arriving two weeks early, "Emmy Mae" weighed in at 6 lbs. and 10 oz. The proud daddy weighs in on his new little girl saying, "She's healthy, wide-eyed and beautiful. What a blessing God has given us through her."

While Matt flew home from Albuquerque, N.M., to witness the birth of his daughter, his fellow band mates carried on during their headlining tour, offering fans an intimate Q & A session from stage and playing songs from their new disc, *The Face of Love* (Sparrow), despite the lead singer's absence. Special guests The Afters and Mainstay also graciously extended their sets as well.



In other Sanctus news, bass player **DAN GARTLEY** and Amy Huffine were married Saturday, March 4, at Ecclesia Church in Franklin, Tennessee. The couple was married by Lloyd Byers, father of Bleach members Milam and Jared Byers. All of the Sanctus guys were in attendance, with the exception of Hammitt who was at home with Emmy Mae.

AND BABY MAKES FOUR...



JASON ROY, lead singer for **BUILDING 429**, and his wife recently welcomed a fourth member to their household. **Haven Madison Roy**, the first daughter and second child for Jason and his wife, was born March 3. She weighed 7 lbs., 12 oz. and was 20 inches long. Mom, Dad and big brother Avery are resting well at home, adjusting to what Jason calls "being a four-piece."

LINDSAY WILLIAMS



5 Questions with CHARLIE HALL

The mention of the word "Passion" leaves audiences paying attention because it automatically brings names to mind such as Chris Tomlin, David Crowder, Matt Redman and Charlie Hall. Oklahoma native Hall has been performing in the big leagues alongside Tomlin, Redman and Crowder for a while now as he travels the country performing at Passion events and Student Life conferences as an integral part of a movement that the *New York Times* called "Christian music's new wave." With his unique brand of worship that continues to resonate with scores of college students across the country, Hall is helping to spearhead the tide of modern worship music. Hall's third groundbreaking album, *Flying Into Daybreak* (sixsteps/Sparrow), hit stores earlier this year.

1. If you could visit any place in the world, where would it be and why?
I would love to visit Tokyo. I have been really intrigued by different cultures the last few years and have gotten to be in the midst of some different ones. Tokyo seems like an incredible place to see old culture and new culture merging together.

2. What's your most embarrassing moment onstage?
A big embarrassment was a time we were playing in Boston. We were playing hard, and a string broke on my guitar. No big deal; I laid it down, and someone grabbed it to change the string. I led without a guitar for a bit, which is odd for me; but I forged ahead. The guitar was back by the first of the next song, and I was relieved. I waited for a musical break, picked up the guitar and strapped it on. I lifted my hand to run my pick down the strings on the down beat in full rock & roll mode. Much to my chagrin, the string had been replaced, but no tuning had been done on the guitar. You would have thought a third-grader picked up the guitar and decided to play along with us. I just kept smiling and laid my guitar down again. You gotta know when to hold 'em and know when to fold 'em.

3. As a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?
I wanted to be either a comedian or a rap artist. I'm only humorous when it isn't purposeful; and I only have rhythm in my hands, which doesn't work very well for dancing while you rap.

4. What's one goal you have as an artist?
I have many goals, but my main goal is to create thought and communication that people can use to pull in close to God and speak to Him. I want to free the heart to speak and sing to God.

5. What's one question you'd like to ask God when you get to heaven?
My assumption is that I will be soaking in all the wonderful things that God will be revealing to us. I think one of the wonders of heaven will be that I will have no more questions. I am a wrestler in terms of my relationship with God, and I ask Him a lot of things. I always end up thinking of heaven and how it will all be downloaded in an instant—all questions answered. I guess if I'm pressed though, I would ask why He allowed certain things to go on down here.

GET INTO CCM OR SINGING NEWS!

EXALTING HIM 2006 is searching for the top unsigned Christian artists—in all genres! Co-sponsored by Daywind Music Group and Salem Music Network, the Grand Prize is a recording contract and a feature story in either **CCM MAGAZINE** or **SINGING NEWS MAGAZINE**.

New this year is a "Lightning Round"—those unable to attend a regional competition can submit a DVD or VHS tape of their stage performance. One soloist and one group from this category will be selected to go direct to the finals.

Exalting Him 2006 entry **deadline is June 16**. Entry forms, official rules and other details are available online at ccmmagazine.com.



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[Highest Debut:.....KUTLESS]

Hearts of the Innocent (BEC)


THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	WEEKS ON CRT	ALBUM ARTIST	TITLE (Label)
1	1	4	 ALAN JACKSON	<i>Precious Memories</i> (Arista/Provident)
2	—	1	KUTLESS	<i>Hearts of the Innocent</i> (BEC)
3	3	13	JEREMY CAMP	<i>Stay</i> (BEC)
4	5	24	FLYLEAF	<i>Flyleaf</i> (Octone/S.R.E.)
5	6	25	KIRK FRANKLIN	<i>Hero</i> (GOSP)
6	2	2	MARTHA MUNIZZI	<i>No Limits</i> (Integrity)
7	7	11	JUANITA BYNUM	<i>Piece of My Passion</i> (Flow)
8	8	9	VARIOUS	<i>WOW Gospel 2006</i> (Verity)
9	9	30	CASTING CROWNS	<i>Lifesong</i> (Reunion)
10	12	21	THIRD DAY	<i>Wherever You Are</i> (Essential)
11	11	25	VARIOUS	<i>WOW Hits 2006</i> (Sparrow)
12	10	9	P.O.D.	<i>Testify</i> (Atlantic/Word)
13	13	40	CHRIS TOMLIN	<i>Arriving</i> (Sixsteps)
14	14	36	MARY MARY	<i>Mary Mary</i> (Integrity)
15	4	2	BUILDING 429	<i>Rise</i> (Word)
16	18	40	RELIENT K	<i>MMHMM</i> (Gotee)
17	16	26	VARIOUS	<i>Gospel: Music From the Motion Picture</i> (Verity)
18	19	30	YOLANDA ADAMS	<i>Day by Day</i> (Atlantic/Word)
19	36	40	JEREMY CAMP	<i>Restored Deluxe Gold Edition</i> (BEC)
20	21	40	CASTING CROWNS	<i>Casting Crowns</i> (Reunion)
21	15	3	SHAWN MCDONALD	<i>Ripen</i> (Sparrow)
22	—	1	MORMON TABERNACLE CHOIR	<i>Then Sings My Soul</i> (DESE)
23	36	31	SELAH	<i>Greatest Hymns</i> (Curb)
24	43	40	NATALIE GRANT	<i>Awaken</i> (Curb)
25	20	23	ISRAEL & NEW BREED	<i>Alive in South Africa</i> (Integrity)
26	31	26	BARLOWGIRL	<i>Another Journal Entry</i> (Fervent)
27	—	1	JESSY DIXON	<i>Touch Me, Lord Jesus</i> (Spring House)
28	27	4	PLUMB	<i>Chaotic Resolve</i> (Curb)
29	23	28	SWITCHFOOT	<i>Nothing Is Sound</i> (Sparrow)
30	34	26	DAVID CROWDER BAND	<i>Collision</i> (sixsteps)
31	22	20	JEREMY CAMP	<i>Live Unplugged</i> (BEC)
32	24	40	MERCYME	<i>Almost There</i> (INO)
33	—	1	TAKE 6	<i>Feels Good</i> (Take 6)
34	29	28	CECE WINANS	<i>Purified</i> (PureSprings Gospel/INO)
35	25	15	VARIOUS	<i>Chronicles of Narnia: Soundtrack</i> (Disney/EMI CMG)
36	42	40	SWITCHFOOT	<i>The Beautiful Letdown</i> (Sparrow)
37	49	40	VARIOUS	<i>O Brother, Where Art Thou?</i> (Lost Highway)
38	28	9	GAITHER VOCAL BAND	<i>Give It Away</i> (Spring House)
39	30	40	NICHOLE NORDEMAN	<i>Brave</i> (Sparrow)
40	62	9	ABSOLUTE	<i>Absolute Modern Worship 2</i> (Fervent)

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TOP ROCK/ALTERNATIVE ALBUMS

THIS WEEK	WEEKS ON CHART	ARTIST	TITLE (Label)
★ 1	1	 KUTLESS	Hearts of the Innocent (BEC)
2	24	FLYLEAF	<i>Flyleaf</i> (Octone/S.R.E.)
3	21	THIRD DAY	<i>Wherever You Are</i> (Essential)
4	7	P.O.D.	<i>Testify</i> (Atlantic/Word)
5	1	BUILDING 429	<i>Rise</i> (Word)
6	73	RELIENT K	<i>MMHMM</i> (Gotee)
7	26	BARLOWGIRL	<i>Another Journal Entry</i> (Fervent)
8	28	SWITCHFOOT	<i>Nothing Is Sound</i> (Sparrow)
9	161	SWITCHFOOT	<i>The Beautiful Letdown</i> (Sparrow)
10	4	NORMA JEAN	<i>O God, The Aftermath</i> (Solid State)
11	77	TOBYMAC	<i>Welcome to Diverse City</i> (ForeFront)
12	93	UNDEROATH	<i>They're Only Chasing Safety</i> (Solid State)
13	56	KUTLESS	<i>Strong Tower</i> (BEC)
14	52	SUPERCHIC[K]	<i>Beauty From Pain</i> (Inpop)
15	53	JARS OF CLAY	<i>Redemption Songs</i> (Essential)
16	36	THOUSAND FOOT KRUTCH	<i>Art of Breaking</i> (Tooth & Nail)
17	60	ANBERLIN	<i>Never Take Friendship Personal</i> (Tooth & Nail)
18	85	BUILDING 429	<i>Space in Between Us</i> (Word)
19	159	RELIENT K	<i>Two Lefts Don't Make a Right</i> (Gotee)
20	22	FALLING UP	<i>Dawn Escapes</i> (BEC)

TOP R&B/HIP-HOP ALBUMS

THIS WEEK	WEEKS ON CHART	ARTIST	TITLE (Label)
★ 1	24	 KIRK FRANKLIN	Hero (Gospocentric)
2	36	MARY MARY	<i>Mary Mary</i> (Integrity)
3	29	CECE WINANS	<i>Purified</i> (Pure Springs Gospel/INO)
4	40	TOBYMAC	<i>Welcome to Diverse City</i> (ForeFront)
5	5	JEFF MAJORS	<i>Sacred</i> (Columbia)
6	40	KJ-52	<i>Behind the Musik</i> (BEC)
7	9	LISA MCCLENDON	<i>Live at the House of Blues</i> (Integrity)
8	24	GEORGE HUFF	<i>Miracles</i> (Word)
9	27	DA T.R.U.T.H.	<i>The Faith</i> (Cross Movement/Provident)
10	40	MARY MARY	<i>Incredible</i> (Integrity)
11	25	T-BONE	<i>Bone-A-Fide</i> (Flicker)
12	32	LECRAE	<i>Real Talk</i> (Cross Movement/Provident)
13	34	KIKI SHEARD	<i>Just Until</i> (EMI Gospel)
14	40	RUBEN STUDDARD	<i>I Need an Angel</i> (Provident)
15	9	FLAME	<i>Rewind</i> (Cross Movement/Provident)
16	36	KIKI SHEARD	<i>I Owe You</i> (EMI Gospel)
17	7	BOBBY BISHOP	<i>Government</i> (Beatmart)
18	32	VARIOUS	<i>Hip Hope Hits 2006</i> (Gotee)
19	40	DEITRICK HADDON	<i>Lost and Found</i> (Verity)
20	40	BEBE WINANS	<i>Greatest Hits</i> (Sparrow)

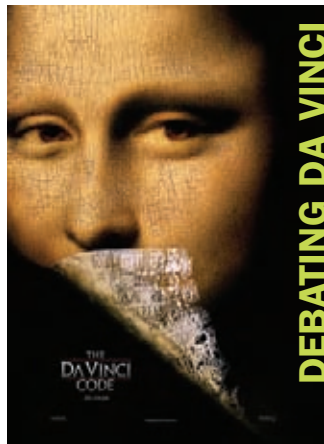
TOP ADULT CONTEMPORARY/POP ALBUMS

THIS WEEK	WEEKS ON CHART	ARTIST	TITLE (Label)
★ 1	181	 JEREMY CAMP	Stay (BEC)
2	31	CASTING CROWNS	<i>Lifesong</i> (Reunion)
3	25	VARIOUS	<i>WOW Hits 2006</i> (Sparrow)
4	3	JEREMY CAMP	<i>Restored Deluxe Edition</i> (BEC)
5	130	CASTING CROWNS	<i>Casting Crowns</i> (Reunion)
6	3	SHAWN MCDONALD	<i>Ripen</i> (Sparrow)
7	53	NATALIE GRANT	<i>Awaken</i> (Curb)
8	4	PLUMB	<i>Chaotic Resolve</i> (Curb)
9	20	JEREMY CAMP	<i>Live Unplugged</i> (BEC)
10	57	MERCYME	<i>Almost There</i> (INO)
11	1	TAKE 6	<i>Feels Good</i> (Take 6)
12	15	VARIOUS	<i>Chronicles of Narnia: Soundtrack</i> (Disney/EMI CMG)
13	44	NICHOLE NORDEMAN	<i>Brave</i> (Sparrow)
14	3	CAEDMON'S CALL	<i>In the Company of Angels</i> (Essential)
15	32	TODD AGNEW	<i>Reflection of Something</i> (SRE/Ardent)
16	26	VARIOUS	<i>Inspired by the Chronicles of Narnia</i> (Sparrow)
17	2	WATERMARK	<i>A Grateful People</i> (Rocketown)
18	51	VARIOUS	<i>WOW #1s</i> (Provident)
19	18	REBECCA ST. JAMES	<i>If I Had One Chance to Tell You Something</i> (ForeFront)
20	9	4HIM	<i>Encore for Future Generations</i> (INO)

TOP PRAISE & WORSHIP ALBUMS

THIS WEEK	WEEKS ON CHART	ARTIST	TITLE (Label)
★ 1	79	 CHRIS TOMLIN	Arriving (sixsteps)
2	26	DAVID CROWDER BAND	<i>Collision</i> (sixsteps)
3	9	ABSOLUTE	<i>Absolute Modern Worship 2</i> (Fervent)
4	47	AMY GRANT	<i>Rock of Ages...Hymns & Faith</i> (Word)
5	13	HILLSONG	<i>Ultimate Worship: Best of Hillsong</i> (Integrity)
6	3	VARIOUS	<i>Best Worship Songs Ever!</i> (Virgin/EMI CMG)
7	10	CHRIS TOMLIN	<i>Live From Austin</i> (sixsteps)
8	22	VARIOUS	<i>Open the Eyes of My Heart</i> (INO)
9	132	DAVID CROWDER BAND	<i>Illuminate</i> (sixsteps)
10	22	RANDY TRAVIS	<i>Glory Train</i> (Word)
11	2	POCKET FULL OF ROCKS	<i>Song to the King</i> (Myrrh)
12	20	DARLENE ZSCHECH	<i>Change Your World</i> (INO)
13	9	AARON SHUST	<i>Anything Worth Saying</i> (Brash/Word)
14	26	BROOKLYN TABERNACLE	<i>I'm Amazed Live</i> (INO)
15	25	VARIOUS	<i>iWorship: No Boundaries</i> (Integrity)
16	124	RANDY TRAVIS	<i>Worship & Faith</i> (Word)
17	237	MICHAEL W. SMITH	<i>Worship</i> (Reunion)
18	182	VARIOUS	<i>iWorship: A Total Worship Exp.</i> (Integrity)
19	29	HILLSONG	<i>God He Reigns</i> (Integrity)
20	22	JOHN TESH	<i>Red Rocks Platinum</i> (Word)

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DEBATING DA VINCI

>>> LIKE IT OR HATE IT, Dan Brown's **THE DA VINCI CODE** (Doubleday) is the biggest-selling novel in history. (It is also one of the most controversial, what with the heresy and all.) No doubt hoping to channel the inevitable backlash to the film version opening in May, Sony Pictures has opened up **TheDaVinciChallenge.com**, a special website to give a platform to prominent evangelical critics. The site includes essays from 45 Christian writers, scholars and leaders, including Hugh Hewitt, George Barna and Richard Mouw.



NEED TO SEE ON TV

The March 28 episode of NBC's "**SCRUBS**" underscored an especially tear-jerking, touchy-feely moment with the decidedly evangelical track "All the Words" by **KUTLESS**. In fact, this lyric just jumped right out of the screen: "By Your grace You let me come talk to You / It's not that I'm worthy / I thank You Jesus for the love that You have shown." The next night **NEED TO BREATHE**—CCM Magazine's April cover artist—landed its song "Don't Wait for Daylight," from the immediately acclaimed debut *Daylight* (Lava/Atlantic/Sparrow), on ABC's new forensic crime series, "**THE EVIDENCE**."

[the REST of the STORY]

New on DVD, a woman on death row seeks redemption in the extended special edition *Woman Thou Art Loosed*. Taken from the acclaimed book and stage play by **BISHOP T.D. JAKES** and starring Jakes as himself, the film chronicles a woman's struggle to come to terms with her legacy of abuse, addiction and poverty. Bonus material includes a half hour of extended sermon sequences and information about T.D. Jakes' ministries.



"LORD OF THE RINGS" OF THE DANCE

A stage production of **THE LORD OF THE RINGS** opened March 23 in Toronto. *USA TODAY* reports that the \$23.2 million production, based on J.R.R. Tolkien's original books rather than the Oscar-winning films, runs about three-and-a-half hours with two intermissions. There are already plans for a London production in addition to discussions in Europe and Japan.



(CHERRY)HOLMES IS WHERE THE HEART IS



Award-winning bluegrass group **THE CHERRYHOLMES** shared the unbridled energy of its live show in four exclusive performances for CMT's "Studio 330 Sessions," found online at cmt.com/music/studio_330_sessions. These intimate performances were shot live at the CMT studios in Nashville.

FIRED UP For those of you who did not make it to the theater to see the **HARRISON FORD** thriller **FIREWALL** (and based on its performance at the box office, it must have been a lot of you), apparently one minor character, "Born-Again Bobby," plays guitar in a worship band. And somewhere in the film is a performance of **PAUL OAKLEY**'s song "Jesus, Friend of Sinners."

We would love to report that Born-Again Bobby brings the bad guys to justice—and to the Lord—but Harrison Ford probably hogged all the glory (glory hog). If we ever see the film, we'll let you know.



DANCING With the STARS

New in theaters is **TAKE THE LEAD**, inspired by the true story of ballroom dancer Pierre Dulaine, whose school dance program was documented in *Mad Hot Ballroom*. **ANTONIO BANDERAS** stars as Dulaine, a professional dancer who volunteers to teach in the New York City public school system. When his classic methods clash with his students' hip-hop instincts, they work together to create a new style of dance, and he becomes their mentor in the process.



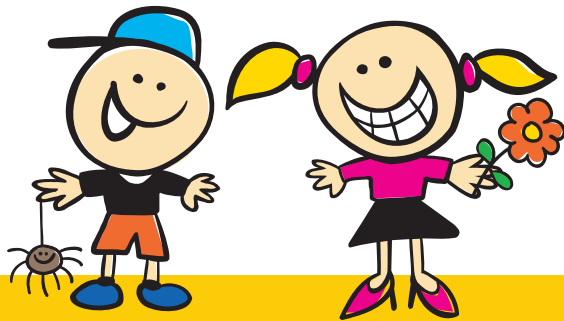
SCREEN GEMS New to DVD is the 1975 big-screen classic **THE HIDING PLACE**, from **BILLY GRAHAM**'s studio, World Wide Pictures. Painstakingly restored, this amazing true story of Holocaust survivor **CORRIE TEN BOOM** details how the ten Boom family joined the underground resistance to help save persecuted Jewish families from the Nazis. But when they are arrested and imprisoned in concentration camps themselves, they're left with nothing to cling to but their faith.



Keep up with the latest "SIGHTINGS" at CCMmagazine.com.

Chris Well's FORTIFIED CCM List-0-Rama

* A compendium of arguably useless and "researched" musings



MOTHER, FATHER: 5 SONGS ABOUT THE JOYS OF PARENTING

As we head into the months of May and, generally, June, we turn our hearts toward home because of Mother's Day and Father's Day. (Actually, we look at the calendar around May 14 and June 18 and say, "D'oh! I didn't get a card in the mail yet!" But I guess that's not really your problem. Unless you're my mom or my dad.)

3. AMY GRANT, "BABY, BABY"

This worldwide smash hit—which led to multiplatinum sales of the album *Heart in Motion* (A&M/Myrrh)—was inspired by the birth of Amy's first daughter, Gloria Mills ("Millie"). As the first "Christian" music song to reach No. 1 on general market radio charts, it was years (and years) before most members of the press (secular and Christian) figured out that: 1) the song was literally about a baby, and 2) in God's eyes, it is OK to write a song about your baby.



4. SHIRLEY CAESAR, "I REMEMBER MAMA"

The queen of gospel dedicated her 1989 live album, *I Remember Mama* (Word), to the memory of her mother, Hallie Martin Caesar. The title track serves as a sort of eulogy, as Shirley shares sweet and tender memories. Currently the pastor of Mount Calvary Word of Faith Church in Raleigh, N.C., Shirley has won numerous Grammy, Dove and Stellar Awards. In 2000, she was inducted into the Gospel Music Hall of Fame.



1. NICHOLE NORDEMAN, "BRAVE"

The title track from her current album, "Brave," was inspired by Nichole's love for her little boy, Charlie. As CCM shared in the May 2005 cover story, the lyric "revels in the reality that while young Charlie makes her 'want to be brave' and even 'feel brave' at times, it's Christ who 'actually makes it so.'"



2. ANTHONY EVANS, "JUST LIKE YOU"

On his acclaimed 2004 solo debut, *Even More* (Integrity), Anthony Evans included a special tribute to his famous father, author and pastor Dr. Tony Evans. "Just Like You" pays thanks for the years his father prayed for his son and inspired the man he would become. Anthony's sophomore release is the brand-new album titled *Letting Go*.



5. BOB CARLISLE, "BUTTERFLY KISSES"

Now a fixture of wedding playlists everywhere, Bob Carlisle wrote this little song as he was coming to grips with the fact that his daughter, Brooke (then almost 16), was growing up. Originally found on the album *Shades of Grace*, the song eventually became a huge hit (seriously, it was huge); and the album was retitled *Butterfly Kisses* (*Shades of Grace*). Bob's latest single, "Keep the Light On," is an anthem for those with loved ones serving in the military.



HEAD 2 HEAD

TELETUBBIES VS. Chris Well



FURRY and ROUND

Has TV in BELLY

Keeps VALUABLES
in CONVENIENT PURSE

Comes in ASSORTMENT of
BRIGHT COLORS

Speaks UNINTELLIGIBLE
GIBBERISH

FURRY and ROUND

Thinks TV in BELLY
would be AWESOME

Always LOSING his STUFF

Avoids BRIGHT LIGHT
when POSSIBLE

IF ONLY

REJECTED HOLIDAYS FOR MAY



1. "April Fool's Revenge" Day
2. "Who Needs Summer Vacation Anyway?" Day
3. "The Gift Card Industry Needed to Shove in Another Holiday Because Sales Projections Were Down" Day

Chris dedicates this page to co-worker Kristi Henson, from whose mandate—excuse me, "suggestion"—this page was inspired. His latest thriller, *Deliver Us From Evelyn* (Harvest House), is in bookstores everywhere. (An excellent gift for mom or dad!)



independents day

✪ Music lovers increasingly want what is authentic and real. We love live albums with their imperfect quality. We enjoy artists who seem endearingly unpolished. We appreciate raw vocals and lyrics with gut-level honesty. Welcome to the world of independent artists.



Matt Wertz
Today & Tomorrow



Beloved indie singer/songwriter Matt Wertz has been touring across the country the last several years, sharing his catchy songs with grateful college audiences. Wertz, who recently opened several shows for Candid Records recording artist Jamie Cullum and Aware/Columbia/Inpop's Mat Kearney, will soon embark on a West Coast run of shows. Check out mattwertz.com for details.

Jonathan Firey

Prayerful Moods



With a glowing endorsement from Phil Keaggy and a spot on the FFH tour, Jonathan Firey is a name you should know. The soul-engaging beauty of his new instrumental CD, *Prayerful Moods*, will lift your spirit. The album is available at select Christian retail stores and on iTunes. Visit fireymusic.com for more details.



Jack in the Pulpit
Life Goes On



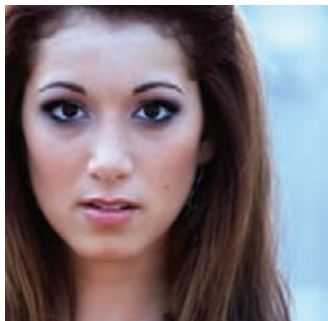
Have you discovered the band Jack in the Pulpit? This Houston-based act with an unusual name (taken from a poisonous flower) has been gaining momentum since its beginning in 2002. With only a three-song EP, Jack in the Pulpit won a national competition, landing the band a trip to Hollywood and the chance to record a full-length album. The resulting disc, *Life Goes On*, may have released in 2004; but it's a creative, fresh, well-produced rock record you should not miss! Here's your ticket: jackinthepulpit.com.

Joanna Martino

My World



Joanna Martino's independent pop album, *My World*, has been making waves. Recently nominated for four Momentum Awards and touring with Overflow this spring, Martino's soaring vocals are connecting audiences to the meaningful lyrics on her album. You can find out more about her by visiting joannamartino.com. Then vote for her on Indie Heaven's radio charts at indieheaven.com.



★ Profiles by Kate McDonald

To submit an independent album or indie news to CCM's columnist for consideration, write to her at: Kate McDonald, Box #8, The UPS Store #2356, 4742 42nd Ave. SW, Seattle, WA, 98116 or e-mail indies@ccmmagazine.com.



—By: Margaret Becker—

You ARE an Artist

Here I was settling up with my incredible tile guy, Johnny, when he offered, "I know who you are. Have loved your music for years."

Feeling kind of rough—straight from my work-out—I self-consciously tucked my hair under my hat. "Well, thanks—I'm surprised you recognized me this way."

"Aw, you look alright!" He grinned and continued on. "I play some, too. It's why I moved here, to write music, but the money ran out; and I had to go back to," he shrugs and looks over his shoulder at my freshly tiled fireplace, "this."

"Well, if your music is anything like your tiling, I would love to hear it," I countered.

And so it began with Johnny. Releasing his 150-grit sandpaper hand, I invited him to bring some songs by next time he was driving through. Two days later, I had a CD of very cool, promising music.

We talked about the songs that afternoon. "So when did you do all this?"

"Some last month, some a while back."

"No, I mean when—with your tile work—did you find time?"

"When I get home, I eat a little something, and then I start programming, playing. I just do it at night and sometimes on the weekend if I am off."

"Wow, you're so talented—a true artist. . ." He smiled, shaking his head "no" before I could even finish my sentence, but I wouldn't let him brush off the comment.

"You are an artist, Johnny. The truth is, if you *do*—you are."

And Johnny does. He can't *not* do. Crazy grammar I know, but profoundly true—for Johnny, and for some of you as well.

This is my new space here at CCM, and I am going to use it to encourage and empower you—as much as you will allow me to anyway. So my first act with this indie column is to tell you a Becker Basic—this is 101 mind you—**if you do, you are**.

Johnny *is* an artist. He may make "tents" with another skill; but, truly, part of his calling "before God" is music—the creation of it. How do I know? Because *he does it*. When it's inconvenient, when he's exhausted, whether or not anyone is validating him, he is creating because he is *compelled*. And his compulsion in this area has helped him craft some fine music that encourages and touches. I know because it's in my CD player right now.

If you "do," you are entitled—in fact required—to don the accompanying title. If you are that person weaving down the interstate as you jot song ideas on scrap paper, you are a writer. If you love the feel of the piano keys under your fingers as you play, you are an artist. If you close your eyes and sing from your soul on Sundays in a choir of 200, you are an artist.

My first official request of you—indie, musician, writer, artist—is what I asked of Johnny that afternoon: Don't stop. Create; be; enjoy; and let us enjoy you. Show us what artists look like in the 2000s. Show us Christ through the arts. Don't look to the left or the right for comparison or validation—look within, where God first placed the gift. Be responsible to it. Do.



For more writings on this subject, see Margaret's new book, *Coming Up for Air* (NavPress), available now at amazon.com and christianbook.com.



industrybeat

by Jay Swartzendruber

A conversation with Blair Masters



Photo By: Krystal Mann

Masters at Work



The name Blair Masters more than rings a bell for Christian music's most avid fans. For more than 15 years, Masters' name has appeared in album liner notes alongside other session greats such as Jerry McPherson (guitar), Tommy Sims (bass) and Chris McHugh (drums). Masters is most widely known as a keyboard virtuoso whose playing has flavored top albums by Casting Crowns, Amy Grant, Third Day, CeCe Winans, Point of Grace, MercyMe, Michael W. Smith, Rebecca St. James, Steven Curtis Chapman and Avalon, among others. In the general market, he has contributed to albums by Garth Brooks, Peter Dinklage, Lorrie Morgan and Pierce Pettis. The multi-talented Masters is also repeatedly called upon to do string arrangements and percussion, while Twila Paris, Point of Grace and Jim Brickman have sought out his services as a producer.

Over the past three years, the Salem, Ore., native has spent an increasing amount of time on the road performing with Peter Dinklage, Michael McDonald, Seals & Seals and Casting Crowns. Interspersed throughout his career, Masters has composed music for The History Channel, A&E, Discovery Channel, NBC and CBS. He recently collaborated with songwriter/guitarist Gordon Kennedy on a song which will appear later this year in Disney's *The Fox and the Hound 2*. Meanwhile, Masters anticipates the release of his own instrumental album by year's end.

How did you first get involved in music and choose it as a career?

I started doing some recording sessions when I was in high school, and I fell in love with the whole process. I never really thought of doing anything else, and my parents were very supportive. I did work as Santa Claus in a department store when I was 18, but as tempting as that was to pursue as a career, I went with music instead...I was very fortunate that my first session in Nashville was with [producers] Brown Bannister and Charlie Peacock. I went to the studio to show them some sound libraries for a keyboard of Charlie's. I was there for about 15 minutes, and Charlie ran out of the room to grab a reel of tape. And I started doing overdubs right then. I spent the next two weeks working with them. Because of that, I was able to work on a ton of records with those guys over the next few years...I was very fortunate to start my recording career with them because that led to countless other opportunities with other producers.

Looking back on your career thus far, is there a personal accomplishment that stands out most for you?

I have successfully avoided having to get a "real" job since I moved to Nashville.

How about a favorite memory?

Besides marrying my wife Karthi in 1992 and the birth of our son in 1995 and the adoption of our daughter from India in 2004? I can't pick just one, but one that's coming to mind right now is the time we cut Darrell Evans' *Freedom* record in Muscle Shoals, Ala. Darrell would play through the song a little bit, and then we all would start playing. And he would talk us through the form while we were recording—much like you would do during a worship service. He would even make up whole new sections to songs on the fly, yelling out chords as we went. It was an unbelievable time of worship. One song lasted over 15 minutes. That was an awesome experience.

How has the scene changed most significantly for session players over the past 10 or 15 years?

The home studio has changed the way records are made in a huge way. I spend probably 90 percent of my time at home by myself programming songs or doing overdubs on projects that are delivered to me. I know the FedEx man better than I know a lot of my clients. The other 10 percent is working somewhere else with actual people instead of computers. 10 to 15 years ago, it was the exact opposite. Technology is great, but I sure do miss the days of four or five guys in a room playing together.

What's your all-time favorite album that you've performed on?

I would have to say Sara Groves' new record *Add to the Beauty*. The songs are amazing, and when we were tracking it, everybody there was freaking out that we got to be part of such a wonderful work of art. Sara is an unbelievable artist.

Your all-time favorite live performance?

I don't know if I can limit it to just one. However, one of the two that stick out would be when I was in the "Chris Gaines" band with Garth Brooks. The band consisted of Gordon Kennedy, Wayne Kirkpatrick, Tommy Sims, Jimmie Lee Sloas, Chris McHugh and Crystal Taliefero. You couldn't ask for a better band. When your only two options on bass are Tommy and Jimmie Lee, you know you have it good. The other would be when I got to do a few dates playing B3 with Michael McDonald. I couldn't believe I was on stage getting to play those legendary songs with him.

Have you ever been a full-on member of a band?

Something not many people know is that I replaced Alan Pasqua in the band Giant [which also featured Dann Huff, David Huff and Mike Brignardello]. That lasted about a month because I met my future wife, Karthi, at the same time, and being with her was a lot more exciting to me than being in a rock band. I was also a member of a band before I moved to Nashville. While it was a good experience traveling and making music, I definitely would rather be home making music.

When music fans ask you about the behind the scenes reality of making albums, what do you pass along that tends to surprise them most?

It seems like most people think that as a session musician, you get some sheet music ahead of time that you have rehearsed before you go into the studio. The reality is, you show up to the session, listen to the demo of the song, jot down a quick chart, then run through it with the band. Most of the performances you hear on records are the third or fourth time you've played the song. Sometimes you get it on the first time through.

A Day Behind the Scenes with Blair

- 6:00** Get up to play basketball at the rec center
- 8:00** Programming/overdubs for Sara Groves
- 12:30** Lunch with some high-powered record executive or my wife
- 1:30** Programming "Regime" soundtrack for radio spot/book release
- 5:30** Dinner
- 6:00** Play time with my kids
- 8:00** Kids to bed
- 10:00** Me to bed



thewriter'sblock

by Matthew West



NASCAR, A DOG NAMED EARL AND CHASING THE RIGHT KIND OF SONG

Earl makes me laugh. Not the Earl from the television show. My puppy, Earl “the Girl.” She’s a little black pug with an identity crisis. She spends most of the day lounging around the house, sleeping in her favorite chair (it used to be my favorite chair before she took it over). But, occasionally, she snaps out of her slumber and turns into a whole different dog.

Today, Earl moseyed into my music room while I was writing. I could tell she was up to no good. Sure enough, she began digging into my CD collection, sniffing out which one she would claim as her new toy. She’s always getting into something. But I knew it wasn’t really the CD she wanted—it was the chase. Earl loves a good chase, and she knew I would come after her. So, as I reached to rescue my CD from Earl’s monster grip, she took off running.

All of a sudden my music room became the fast track for the Puppy 500. She ran circles around me so fast that I thought she was going to burn a hole in the carpet! Trying to catch Earl is like trying to win a NASCAR race on rollerblades. It just ain’t happening. Still, I chased that little puppy until she decided the race was over. Exhausted, Earl celebrated her victory in the winner’s circle by napping for the rest of the day in “our” favorite chair. She’s got it rough!

Earl isn’t the only thing I’ve been chasing in that music room. Most days, I’m in there chasing the song. Instead of the Puppy 500, I’m doing laps around a lyric—racking up the miles around a melody and

making the occasional pit stop for a cup of coffee and some clarity. Each song is a different kind of chase. Sometimes I chase the music first, sitting at the piano or maybe picking up my guitar. And, sometimes, I start with a lyric idea or a title. Some days I chase a song for a while, only to realize I was chasing the wrong thing and have to start over.

A couple summers ago, I was on vacation in Maine when I started chasing this song called “13.” Inspired by the laidback surroundings of my summer vacation on the beach, the song wound up being this sort of chilled out, acoustic story song about how I met God at the age of 13. But that was only the beginning of the chase. When I returned home from my trip, I sat down with my friend and collaborator, Sammy Mizell. He started

SONGWRITING TIP #97:

IF AT FIRST YOU
DON’T SUCCEED,
CHASE ANOTHER
SONG.

playing this up-tempo thing on the guitar, and we started singing the words “*next thing you know.*” For some reason, the lyrics from the “13” song I wrote on vacation came to mind, and I started reciting them over the new music bed. The words just fell into place with the music, and the chase ended with a new song finding its final destination.

Does your day ever feel like the Puppy 500? Have you ever chased something you thought would bring you happiness only to come up empty? The right relationship? The promising career? Acceptance from a group of friends? These are some of the things we chase in life. But God wants us to chase after one thing and one thing only. Check out what Matthew 6:33 has to say about the things we chase: “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (NIV).

So, as you write the song of your life today, make sure you’re chasing the right things. Chase after His will for your life, and He will direct your path. If you do, you’ll be the one in the winner’s circle—not the one with the rollerblades on.

New dad and Universal South singer/songwriter Matthew West has written songs recorded by Natalie Grant, Joy Williams, Point of Grace and Rascal Flatts, among others. His latest album, *History*, released in 2005 and features the hit single “Next Thing You Know.” For more information visit matthewwest.com.



Edison Glass SUPERNATURAL SELECTION

The moniker “**EDISON GLASS**” is a combination of the last name of a famous American inventor (Thomas Edison) and the last name of an eclectic modern composer (Philip Glass). There is an air of mystery and intrigue that surrounds this band that seems quite natural and not the least bit pretentious. The music is uplifting and refreshing and, as you might imagine, loaded with meaning. After seven years of constant writing, recording and playing, Edison Glass—featuring Joshua Silverberg (vocals/guitar), James Usher (guitar) and brothers Joe (drums) and Mountain (vocals/bass) Morin—recently released its debut album, **A BURN OR A SHIVER**, on Credential Recordings. For more information, check out edison-glass.com.

PAUL: How is God portrayed through your art?

JAMES: We strive for creativity, innovation and beauty in our music, and we feel that speaks of God’s inspiration. In our lyrics we try to be honest about how we see God in our lives.

PAUL: What are the differences between your record and your live show?

JOSHUA: Every show is a unique experience. There are often moments when I feel prompted to share by talking to the audience or singing something spontaneous. For example, at the end of “When All We Have Is Taken,” we leave the last few minutes for something special to happen. It’s the part of the show where I close my eyes and just listen to what I think needs to be sung or played. For us, it is truly a worshipful experience.

PAUL: What’s A Burn or a Shiver all about?

JAMES: The title *A Burn or a Shiver* attempts to explain the feeling of a supernatural experience by describing it with the natural senses.

PAUL: What’s your current favorite song on your new record?

JOSHUA: It’s impossible for the band as a whole to answer this question, but “The River” is one of our favorites. We love it because it keeps us aware that we should not stay stagnant in our walks with God. I think the line from the song that explains it best is, “*Shall I settle for a quick rain or search for the source?*”

HYPER STATIC UNION—comprised of Shawn Lewis (vocals/guitar), Ray Burnham (drums), Bryan Albrechtson (guitar) and Mike Jackson (bass)—is a modern rock/pop/soul/funk outfit from the northwestern United States. The band’s label debut recording, **LIFEGIVER**, which is set to release May 9, was produced by Third Day’s Mac Powell and is the first release on Rocketown’s new modern rock imprint, RKT Music. While praising the band as a whole, Powell recently singled out Hyper Static Union’s front man, Shawn Lewis, saying he “is hands down the most talented guy I know.” See hyperstaticunion.com for more information.

PAUL: What sets Hyper Static Union’s music apart from other artists?

SHAWN: We err on the side of funk. We are a rock band with soul, jazz and funk influences...I think funk music influences pretty much everyone to some degree, but we really try to pay that medium homage as much as we can within the realms of an accessible rock song.

PAUL: How do you combine your faith and your art?

SHAWN: I think it’s better for us as a band to answer that question with another question: How do we combine our faith and our lives? Well, if the Good News is truly good—and it is—it should be effervescing from our soul no matter what line of work we’re in, no matter whose house we visit, no matter what party we stumble onto and so on. We sing about Jesus Christ because His death and resurrection are the most important things that happened to us. I’m not going to say that I’ll never pen a song about my love for my wife, or friends who recently died, or cartoons getting saved or whatever. I’m simply saying that God’s hand is evident in all aspects of our lives, so the field is wide open to me.

PAUL: What’s Mac Powell like as a producer?

SHAWN: He’s pretty much the ultimate producer. He has that unique ability to let the band be themselves but also to challenge the band to be the best “them” they can be. He’s all about “trimming the fat.” He’s a man who likes his steaks lean as well as his rock songs. If there’s a part in the tune that takes up time and is border line unnecessary, he taught us that it’s better to cut it out and see if you miss it or not. You’ll never be able to record a seven-minute epic, progressive rock tune with Mac at the helm, which is probably good for all our sakes. He just has a keen awareness of his audience, and that came in really handy for us.

Hyper Static Union BE LIKE MAC





Eleventyseven THEORY OF REVOLUTION

ELEVENTYSEVEN, which hails from Greenville, South Carolina, has been cranking out its hyperactive punk pop music for nearly four years. The band's label debut, **AND THE LAND OF FAKE BELIEVE**, which releases May 16 on Flicker Records, is original, evocative and always fun. Eleventyseven—featuring Matt Langston (vocals/guitar/synth), Caleb Satterfield (bass) and Jonathan Stephens (drums)—spent the early part of 2006 on the road with Superchic[k], Seven Day Slumber and KJ-52. Check out **eleventysevenrock.com** for more information.

PAUL: *What do you want people to get from your shows?*
MATT: We want people to come away from our set with a feeling of joy. We hope they will forget about their problems for a little while and just enjoy being with other people who aren't judging whether they're "scene" enough or "punk" or "Christian" enough.

PAUL: *If a fan asked you after a show to describe your relationship with God, what would you say?*
MATT: My faith is very practical and down to earth. I've never had any amazingly spiritual, mushy, Christiany feeling inside to accompany my faith. God has always met me exactly where I am in very practical ways. My faith and trust in the Lord is what gives my life its purpose and meaning. It's about modeling integrity when it's difficult and unpopular to do so. It's about standing up for what is right no matter how the world justifies its actions.

PAUL: *Tell us about the song "More Than a Revolution."*
MATT: Many bands and churches have songs or programs that incite a false sense of revolution in impressionable kids. If their intentions are dishonorable, it shows. "More Than a Revolution" encourages listeners to look past the hype and see that real revolution starts with one person at a time. It's in the way you treat your friends or spouse when they've wronged you. It's in how much you tip your waitress, how often you hold your tongue, and how willing you are to encourage your family instead of tearing them down.

Singer/songwriter/author Paul Colman, the former front man of Grammy nominated and Dove Award winning act Paul Colman Trio, recently became the Newsboys' new guitarist. The latest single from his current solo album, **Let It Go** (Inpop), is "Holding On to You." Colman currently tours, speaks and performs internationally. For more information visit **paulcolman.com**.

Band Wagon BY KRISTI HENSON

The popularity of reality TV shows such as "American Idol" and "Making the Band" suggests that many people possess an interest in the process of becoming a professional artist—or, at least, in the *making* of an artist. Join us as we follow three new bands over the next couple years down the road less traveled. First up this month is **GROUP 1 CREW**.



If you are interested in pursuing a career as a professional musician—and we mean "professional" in the "full-time, day job, potential rock star" sense of the word—then you should be prepared to follow a sometimes long and winding road. However, one piece of sage advice seems to ring true: Do what you love, and the rest will follow. (This is basically the same wisdom contained in the "if you build it, they will come" concept.)

That's the path followed by three-man band **GROUP 1 CREW**. According to founding member Manwell, G1C started in Orlando, Fla., as a "Bible study/music group/friendship circle" made up of some 13 members, just doing what they loved to do—worship and play music. The current grouping, consisting of Manwell, Blanca and Pablo (all of whom originally met in high school), has been consistent for about three years.

Individually, the members of Group 1 Crew put out independent solo projects reflecting their own unique styles and voices. Then, when G1C became a bit more serious about its collective musical endeavor, it produced an independent project and began performing concerts anywhere and everywhere in its hometown. These efforts eventually led to interest from management and record labels (both to be discussed in future columns).

To get there, though, a foundation had to be laid. In addition to "honing your skills," researching and learning the music business, Manwell encourages aspiring artists to look within themselves first. "Two things that are most important to me—that I keep on my top priority list—are integrity and character," Manwell offers. "My advice would be to really start asking God to show parts of your heart in small areas, man—small areas that nobody sees, that not even [you] yourself speak out, just things that go on in your mind, little ways that you feel in your heart about compromises that you will and won't do...Deal with your integrity first...If you can become that person who strives after integrity and character, then God can trust you with these bigger things. And, to me, that's above everything."



The Kingdom That Comes to Us

Not too long ago, while visiting John Knox Presbyterian in Seattle, I heard Ben Patterson utter one of those kinds of statements that, when you first hear it, sounds like nonsense, then like paradox, and, finally, like a truth that is beyond words. Only, from the moment that truth dawns on you, you realize you'll spend the rest of your life trying to put words to it. During his sermon, Ben said, "We do not go to heaven; heaven comes to us."

Though it should mean everything to us, the notion of heaven has become virtually meaningless. So why does the Bible say so little about it? If it is only supposed to be some kind of final reward, you would think there should be more detail provided to make the prize as promising as possible. But I suspect that, like practically everything else we think we know about the Scriptures, we have it wrong; or else, possessing such a limited piece of the picture, like the blind man holding the elephant's tail, we conclude there is nothing more.

Maybe heaven is more than the prize at the end of the race, more than the place we "go to" when we die. Maybe it is infinitely more. Perhaps it is not the far-off, unimaginable country outside time—just maybe, like Ben said, it is coming to us, *has* come to us in answer to Jesus' prayer, "*Your kingdom come...*" (Matt. 6:10).

Jesus often said heaven is like this or that—like a seed, or a net or a feast. If it is an unimaginable place, then why would Jesus ask us to imagine what it is like? It must be "perceivable," "imaginable." What follows are a few "imaginings" that I hope will help us to understand how we might begin to perceive this kingdom that is coming to us. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, only one that is meant to encourage you to start one of your

own. Each example begins with a human weakness that acts like a key to unlock the mystery of the heaven that has come to us and, yet, is still to come.

Thirst—In his sermon, Ben told a story of running a race that had been improperly measured. Instead of running six miles, he ran nine! At the end of that race, he had never experienced a thirst so intense. When he finally had a chance to quench that thirst at the end of the confusing race, he experienced something transcendent. The thirst became a vehicle for imagining heaven. *Revelation 21:6* declares:

"To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life."

The human weakness of thirst makes possible the perception. An echo of the heaven that comes to us is experienced every time any deep thirst is felt or satisfied. Though the promise in Revelation is still a future promise, isn't the way paved with a thousand cups of cold water we have offered in Jesus' name? Doesn't the kingdom of heaven come each time the thirst is redemptively quenched?

Hunger—This is more difficult to grasp, since few of us have ever experienced real hunger. I remember once miscalculating the amount of food I would need for a weekend hiking trip. When I ran out of food a day early, I changed directions, making a beeline for the nearest small town. On the sidewalk, outside a KFC, I inhaled a bucket of chicken. Though it is a puny example, given the genuine hunger of so many poor, it was my closest brush with the real thing. That hunger still serves as a key. That long-ago emptiness pointed to a promise:

"To everyone who is victorious I will give some of the manna that has been bidden away in heaven" (Rev. 2:17).

When Jesus said, "*I was hungry and you fed me*" (Matt. 25:35), He brought together His hunger with ours. Every time we come to His table, the place where He deals most definitively with our hunger, we should hear an echo, like approaching footsteps, of the kingdom of heaven that is coming to us.

Self-doubt—I remember those times when I tried to please my father, waiting for a drop of encouragement. There was no silence so empty or bitter for me. I particularly remember once bringing home a straight-A report card. I know my father was only trying to encourage me, but his response was, "If you can make straight A's, you can make straight A-pluses." There has been an ache, a deficit, in me ever

since. Will anything I do ever be good enough? But that ache is an echo that reminds me of the moment when the kingdom will fully break through, and we will all be swept away by a flood of affirmation when we hear, "*Well done, my good and faithful servant*" (Matt. 25:21, 23).

Until that time, the words of the author of Hebrews, "*but encourage one another, especially now that the day of His return is drawing near*" (Heb. 10:25), remind us of the kingdom that comes to us every time a brother or sister affirms us.

The list could go on and on: the moment in the morning when you first put your glasses on and everything snaps into focus, the instant when the confusion clears and the sum or the answer or the solution appears and a light comes on. Our days are filled with these moments, rooted in our weakness, that remind us that heaven is coming to us. These desires reveal our design for heaven. The present moment is seeded with the Coming; they are seeds waiting to sprout and grow as the kingdom comes to us, finally and fully.

**"Come to me,
all of you who are weary
and carry heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest."**

—MATTHEW 11:28 (NEW LIVING TRANSLATION)



COMMIT: In your own experience, do you hear any of these small echoes of the kingdom that come to you? When you suffer from loneliness, do you sense there is something or Someone else that you are ultimately lonely for? When Jesus says, *“And be sure of this, I am with you always”* (Matt. 28:20), what does that make you hope for?

Have you ever been homesick? *“I am preparing a place just for you...”* (John 14:2).

When you feel exhausted, do you hear the present-tense promise of the kingdom that has come to you? *“Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest”* (Matt. 11:28).

“To me, God’s kingdom comes when I am willing to give up my kingdom, my way, my rights, and choose to live in His kingdom and His ways.”

— Lauren Barlow (*BarlowGirl*)



Michael Card is an award-winning scholar, musician and radio broadcaster who resides in Franklin, Tennessee. His new album, *The Hidden Face of God*, released last month. This enhanced CD with a devotional booklet features songs of lament. Visit michaelcard.com for more information.

{ WE BELIEVE THE CHILDREN ARE OUR FUTURE }

OUR CHILDREN ARE GROWING LIKE BEANSTALKS. AT LEAST THIS IS WHAT THE PICTURES WE GET IN THE MAIL PORTRAY. WE, THE EDITORIAL TEAM AT CCM, HAVE BEEN PRIVILEGED TO BE A PART OF THE LIVES OF TWO CHILDREN SINCE THE BEGINNING OF 2005 THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS WITH WORLD VISION AND COMPASSION INTERNATIONAL, TWO OF THE WORLD’S LEADING HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS. THROUGH THE YEARS, CCM HAS COVERED THE MINISTRIES OF COUNTLESS ARTISTS WHO HAVE SPONSORED CHILDREN AND ENCOURAGED THEIR FANS TO GET INVOLVED WITH THESE ORGANIZATIONS BY SPONSORING CHILDREN OF THEIR OWN. AT THE BEGINNING OF LAST YEAR, WE DECIDED TO GET FURTHER INVOLVED.

So, here’s just a small glimpse into the personalities of our two kids. We promised we’d keep you up to date on the lives of the little ones that we sponsor in order to give you a taste of the good that is being done in developing countries as a direct result of the efforts of World Vision and Compassion International. From time to time, the girls send us letters with details about their lives and pictures that they have drawn and colored.

Our Compassion child, Sadia, is a second grader who lives in Africa and, much like any kid in the States, was recently thrilled to have a break from school. She writes, “During the school vacation, I went to visit my grandmother at the

village. She is very well. Back at home, I helped my mother do housework, and I also had fun with my friends. I also resumed going to the Child Development Center where I learned new songs and Bible stories.” Sadia also said that she heard about Hurricane Katrina and her sweet prayers would be with us.

World Vision has helped us get to know Ambika, who lives in India and will turn 8 years old in July. Ambika is quite an ambitious student whose favorite subjects include math, social studies and science. Recently, she was promoted from third to fourth grade following her annual exams. Right now she is enjoying her summer break, which runs through the first of June. Ambika writes, “I am very much thankful to you for all your love and concern and continuous support.”

Although she is in good health, according to the periodic report World Vision sends us, Ambika, is considered a “HopeChild” since she lives in a community severely affected by HIV/AIDS.

There are many children just like Sadia and Ambika you can come to know and love. For about \$30 a month, you can change the life of a child. Join CCM and other concerned people who believe the children are our future. Then, teach them well, and let them lead the way.

Visit compassion.com or wvi.org for more information.

LINDSAY WILLIAMS



Sadia, Age 8



Ambika, Age 7



BREATH

AFTER A PROFOUND AND WIDELY REPORTED SEASON OF LOSS AND STRUGGLE, THE MEMBERS OF **MERCYME** FEEL LIKE THEY CAN COME UP FOR AIR.

PHOTOS BY: JEREMY COWART

WRITTEN BY: BEAU BLACK



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A LOVED ONE DIAGNOSED WITH CANCER. ANOTHER KILLED IN A CAR WRECK. A PARENT GONE TOO SOON. DURING THE MAKING AND SUBSEQUENT RELEASE OF 2004'S *UNDONE* (INO), IT SEEMED TO BE BAD NEWS ON TOP OF BAD NEWS FOR THE GUYS IN MERCYME. THEY'VE BECOME A SORT OF POSTER BAND FOR LOSS, HERALDED BY THEIR SIGNATURE, CULTURE-IMPACTING BALLAD, "I CAN ONLY IMAGINE," AND ITS SEQUEL, "HOMESICK."

But life's different now. Though some struggles remain, it's spring, both spiritually and literally, on the day we meet up in Dallas near the band's home in Greenville, Texas. Guitarist Mike Scheuchzer says that "after all those things, right now it seems everything's pretty good. [Front man Bart Millard's] father-in-law is still having some health problems, but it seems like they can come up for air right now. And I think that comes across on the record."

With the success of their first three albums (selling four million copies and counting), the band has earned the right to stretch a little on its newest, and the guys are eager to talk about making it. The difference is instantly noticeable but measured. It's an evolution and extension of their first three albums but not a huge departure.

RETURNING TO THEIR ROOTS

"We were a rock band when we first started," Millard says, "and finally everything lined up" to do an edgier record. "The label was saying, 'Here's your chance. Everything's going a little heavier these days.' The best quote from the label in the middle of mixing was when Jeff [Moseley, INO's president] said, 'Hey, maybe the guitars need to be a little hotter.' And we said, 'Yes!'" [Laughs]

The result, Scheuchzer says, is "fun music. I think we've captured who MercyMe is live better on this record than we have in the past. It's a little more organic." He says being away and having nearly a month to focus solely on recording spurred their creativity. [See the "Coming Back to Rock" sidebar.]

Having had a respite from the road, they're eager to get to play the new material live. Scheuchzer says, "As men you feel like you're supposed to be doing something to support the family and be working, and, for us, our [touring] is that. So we're kind of itching to get back to work. We have the greatest job in the world."

"We're able to tour for the love of it," says Millard. Most artists depend on touring for income, seeing little money from CD sales. But MercyMe's record deal is different: "We're more in a partnership. Our biggest risk was the first record [*Almost There*]. We paid for the budget, and they [INO] paid for the marketing." The album's wild success has allowed the band to cover future recordings and splurge a little on its shows.

"We're able to put more into [concert] production—video screens or whatever. We take great pride in putting on a great show," says Millard. "Our motto is, 'We ain't jumpin', so you might as well watch something else.'"

The members of MercyMe may love touring; but given the choice, there's nothing like the haven of home. Though they could be kickin' it in Christian

music's mecca, Nashville, they've remained 600 miles to its west in Texas, staying focused on family and away from "The Biz." As we sit down, Scheuchzer quickly informs me that "every one of us would rather be at home playing with our kids" than doing a photo shoot—or an interview. Nice.

FOR THE LOVE OF SAM

Millard says he spends as much time as he can with his three kids. Though life's calmed down quite a bit, it's not all been easy. Sam, his 4-year-old son, was diagnosed two years ago with diabetes. "I think the one blessing from all of that is that you have no choice but to be involved. In every aspect, Sam is a huge part of my life," says Millard.

Part of the challenge is a strictly regimented schedule of meals and snacks, blood sugar checks and insulin injections—a lot for a 4-year-old and his parents. "You get up and check his blood sugar. If he's low, he gets 15 grams of carbs (usually candy); and you wait 15 minutes and see if he's normal, which is about 150 for his age. Anything below 80, it's low, and he gets candy. You're trying to get it above 80 and below 300. If it's high, you give him a shot."

That process continues all day, with scheduled snacks mid-morning and afternoon, meals of precisely 45 carbs and careful checks of his blood sugar. He also gets shots in the morning, midday and evening. "He gets at least three [shots] a day. And it doesn't stop there. At midnight we check him, and at 3 [a.m.] we check him. Every night," he says.

Those requirements make it hard for him to try out new foods. "If he takes a bite and doesn't like it, you've got to figure a way to count what he's eaten; and it's got to be spot on. Anything can be fixed with insulin, but you're trying to avoid that as much as possible." To that end, Millard says he's learned the number of carbs in just about everything.

Scheuchzer got to experience this all first hand. "Mike and his wife had all the band kids at their house. He said he wanted to learn how to take care of Sam," Millard explains. "We came out at dinner and gave him his shot because they weren't sure about that."

"Every few hours I'd call and say, 'You've gotta check him.' And all through the night, he'd do it; and it broke Mike's heart. . . he had no idea. Most people have no idea how much diabetes consumes your life. He called me in the morning, and Sam was low [during] the night; and Mike had to wake him up and give him four little Sweet Tart things. And he goes, 'Man, I just started crying. He was deep asleep and had to wake up and eat.'"

"There are some times it hits you hard," Millard continues. "There are some times we have to do 10-20 finger pricks a day. He's used to it now—he'll tell us which finger he wants. It was hard at first. It was a wrestling match every time. We call it our 'new normal' now."

Though this taxing process is now normal, "you have those days when you get angry at God and say 'Why him?' Shannon [Bart's wife] has her days when I'm on the road." Sam's condition is further complicated when he gets sick. "When Sam has a cold, it's like pneumonia for someone else. You have to fight the symptoms of being sick, but you have to watch his blood sugar as well. You're on

Cont. on p. 32...

"WE HAVE THE GREATEST JOB IN THE WORLD."

— Mike Scheuchzer

FOR THE RECORD



Fans aren't the only ones extremely pleased with MercyMe's new album. Singer/songwriter Derek Webb, whose work—and endorsements for that matter—carry the coveted badge of street cred, is quick to lavish praise on *Coming Up To Breathe*. "At a moment when you would expect most bands to sound restricted and bound by the expectations and pressures of success, MercyMe sounds like a band completely liberated," he says. "*Coming Up To Breathe* sounds like a seasoned band stretching their legs, taking important chances at an important moment in their career. This is certainly the sound of MercyMe surfacing and taking a deep breath as if it was their first. To them I say, 'Well done, brothers.'" Meanwhile, The Afters' own Josh Havens had this to say: "I love that MercyMe continues to raise themselves artistically to a level beyond their last project. *Coming Up To Breathe* is no exception to that. It's challenging yet encouraging lyrics, coupled with solid pop/rock melodies, makes this my favorite MercyMe album to date."

COMING BACK TO ROCK

Recording on *Coming Up to Breathe* started last October in upstate New York's Allaire Studio—a new setting, with a new producer. Millard says the band had settled on Brown Bannister as the producer for last year's holiday release, *The Christmas Sessions* (INO). "He does so many of them—he's like Mr. Christmas record." He also produced Millard's solo debut, *Hymned No.1*—and has worked with everyone from Third Day and The Afters to Michael W. Smith and Amy Grant.

After three records helmed by producer Pete Kipley, MercyMe was excited to try something new. "We were so happy with the Christmas record, and we respond differently to Brown," says Millard. "We kind of grew up with Pete. He's like a seventh member, or having a really good friend work on the record.

"[Brown's] a legend in Christian music," he continues. "He has this amazing ability to make you better. He doesn't really get involved—he makes you do it but might say, 'Yeah, that works' or 'Let's try something else.' He's an amazing encourager and makes you think you can do anything in the world."

Says Scheuchzer, "It was really cool for us to go in a completely different direction. Pete's real hands-on, involved in every part of the song,

Brown's real laid back—he has amazing ideas; but he lets us run down all our avenues before he speaks up. Pete did a fabulous job on the first three. He helped us become a better band, better songwriters. But we felt like it was time for a change, and Pete was really busy."

That different approach was sometimes radical—taking songs apart, putting them back together and, at times, totally reinventing them. One of Scheuchzer's favorites, "Something About You," morphed from "an aggressive rock song to soaring anthem." He says he loved MercyMe's first version and was afraid he wouldn't like the change, "but I totally did. It just blew me away." Added bonus: recording strings for the song at Abbey Road in London.

Another favorite for both guys is the song "Hold Fast." Driven by whining guitars and sweeping strings, its message of encouragement is addressed "To everyone who's hurting/To those who've had enough/To all the undeserving/That

should cover all of us." "Musically it's one of the coolest things we've done," says Millard. "The back half of it just rocks. That's the one most musicians comment on."

The real attraction of using Bannister was a nearly 20-year-old record: "White Heart's *Freedom* (Sparrow) is one of my favorite albums from growing up," says Millard. "Brown's been with Avalon and Amy for so long, people forget about the rock stuff. *Freedom* and [Amy Grant's] *Lead Me On* [Myrrh] were life-changing records for me. If you ask anyone in the band, 'Was this your White Heart *Freedom*,' they'd understand. Every musician has that standard, and they're like, 'I want this to be my *Freedom*, or my *Lead Me On*, or my [Michael W. Smith's] *eye 2 [i]* (Reunion).'" **B.B.**



From left: Barry Graul, Mike Scheuchzer, Bart Millard, Jim Bryson, Nathan Cochran, Robby Shaffer

the phone constantly with the doctor, and he can end up in the ER. And it's for the rest of his life unless there's a cure."

THE ART OF ADOPTION

As with Millard, much of Scheuchzer's down time is focused on his expanding family. He and his wife already have a 16-month-old and are beginning the process of international adoption. "We're finishing up paperwork this week, and then it'll be in the hands of the adoption agency and Kazakhstan. We felt like the biggest need was international—physically and spiritually."

The process is complicated: "They assign us a child and send us a picture and/or a video. We take that into a specialist to make sure he or she is developing properly. We'll approve or deny it. And then we'll wait a couple of months, and they say, 'You're traveling in two weeks.'" "Traveling" means moving to Kazakhstan, wedged between China and Russia, for four to six weeks.

"It's cool the way God laid it all out. We'd decided this and visited a new church in Greenville, and the guy who taught Sunday school was talking about his experience in Kazakhstan." The man's whole family had served in missions there and invited the Scheuchzers over to share their experiences. "We were kicking ourselves, like, 'Can you believe this?' We're really excited about how God brought it all together."

After they decided on Kazakhstan, Scheuchzer says, "We found out it was the most expensive place to adopt from. I would have thought that would have made me more nervous, but it seemed to confirm it for me and gave me a peace knowing that God's going to make it happen in His timing. God adopts us; it's a beautiful picture," he says, of being "able to rescue someone from a bad situation—especially a child."

TEXANS "Я" US

Small-town living has helped keep the members of the band close. Greenville is an hour from Dallas, and there's not a lot to do in the town of 20,000. Millard plays golf—and the guys are all semi-rabid baseball fans. They've even worked out a deal to do some charity shows in exchange for a suite at the Texas Rangers' home in Arlington.

Bryson, for his part, sucked the band into his interest in NASCAR: "I'm a fan, some say 'stalker.'" He collects memorabilia, and he also admits to sneaking into the pit for a race.

When quizzed on the appeal of watching cars go around and around over and over again, Bryson says, animatedly, "Everyone says that until they go to one. But when they come by at that speed, and you hear the rumble...and they play the National Anthem and a fighter jet squadron goes over...it's not like a ballgame."

OK.

"We're kind of NASCAR fans by default. Five of us hated it until Jim drug us into it," Millard laughs. He says they became fans after they performed at a chapel service "to make Jim's dream come true. We razz Jim more than anyone on the planet," says Millard, "but, fortunately, he can take it. Keyboard players have to be made fun of."

"We're like brothers," Millard continues. "By the end of every tour, we get sick of each other, but I can't imagine doing this with anyone else. I've heard stories about other bands that just kind of work together and aren't really close. We're incredibly close. We've done this for nearly 12 years."

He rattles off the band's members like he's talking about family: "Barry [Graul, guitarist] and Mike I see almost every day. Jim [Bryson, keyboardist] lives out in the country—Little House on the Prairie. Robby [Shaffer, drummer] lives in Dallas, and I talk to him on the phone every day. Nathan [Cochran, bassist] kinda goes off and does the family thing."

"Someone asked me the other day when I had 'alone time,'" recalls Millard. "And I said, 'Alone time'? The way my wife sees it, when I go to New York for a meeting, that's my free day. There's no day off, and I'm not bitter about it. On a day like today, when we're working, to my wife, that's a free day. She's like, 'Enjoy it.' [Laughs] When you're gone as much as we are...when I'm at home, I'm with family. Steven Curtis [Chapman] calls it 're-entry' when you get off the road and get back into the system, back into the schedule."

Even off the road, he has plenty to do. Aside from Simple Records [see sidebar], Millard is planning a second solo album of roots/Americana-flavored hymns to follow *Hymned No. 1*. Plus there's that golf score to work on.

KEEPING IT RELATIONAL

In talking about the bandmembers' various ventures, it becomes clear that "family" extends to the crew around them as well. The band seems to look for people to invest in.

Scheuchzer says their merchandise guy "wasn't a merch guy when we hired him. He was just a good hang—and an athlete [who lowers their golf score considerably]. Our stage manager hadn't set foot on stage when we met him—didn't know how to tune a guitar. But we taught him."

"You wouldn't think that would be a good hire, but he was such a good guy and had such a great heart for ministry and was a hard worker and was willing to learn." While MercyMe's off the road, he's out with Third Day putting to use the skills he's learned with Millard and Co.

"There are so many bands out there that are better bands, better musicians, that it was fitting for us to hire a pretty motley crew to fill these slots for us and to make them part of our family," says Scheuchzer. "I think that's what we're supposed to do as Christians—invest in people," following the model of discipleship Jesus walks out in the Gospels.

So where do they go from here? Oddly, Millard says, "On this one, we just want to sell enough records to do it again, to change it again. For us, when you change one thing, it seems like you've changed everything. I have friends who've said, 'The album is great—it's edgier, but it's not a huge departure. It still sounds like MercyMe.' This is us telling the label that we want to take the chance; and if it works, they'll follow our lead. I don't know that I'd want to reinvent ourselves much from where we are right now. I'm happy with the way things are going." **ccm**

FROM SIMPLE

Last year Bart Millard and his friend/producer Pete Kipley partnered with MercyMe's label, INO, to launch Simple Records. It's a tough time to start a new label. Just ask Creative Trust or Michael Blanton and Dan Harrell, who collectively manage Third Day, Steven Curtis Chapman, Amy Grant and Michael W. Smith—and recently saw their young labels quickly fold.

Millard knows that: "Owning a label at this point, with the whole digital world, is probably the dumbest thing I've ever done. The labels are going the way of the buffalo unless something changes. But there's no pressure [on us] as far as getting records out—just putting out things we like."

So far, it's worked out for the Simple gang. Their first act, The Afters, scored a Christian and mainstream hit with "Beautiful Love." It's been picked as the theme song for the MTV show "8th & Ocean," which has restarted the song's momentum; and its video will be featured on the network's "Total Request Live."

Now, the label's bringing out two new artists, worshiper Phil Wickham and college band Foreign Oren.

Of Wickham, Millard gushes, "It's my favorite record right now. Even if it were on another label, I'd be promoting it. He's the whole package: he's an amazing worship leader; he's very solid spiritually; he has an amazing voice and is an amazing writer. Musically, it's as cool as anything out there, mainstream or Christian; but they're straight worship songs. There's a lot of integrity in the songs he's writing. It's a huge breath of fresh air." Millard goes on and on. "When you hear someone with that kind of passion, it's hard not to listen up," he says, describing it as a "vibey, Rufus Wainwright kind of thing." MercyMe is taking Wickham out on its next two tours to introduce him to its fans.

Fellow Texans Foreign Oren started as a college-oriented worship band called Shoreline. "That's Pete's project. They have a great cult following," says Millard. "They'd love to just do clubs. They're phenomenal live—ridiculously good." Because the band has limited appeal for Christian pop radio, the Simple crew was careful to make a record that made sense: "We're not going to spend a bunch of money that they can't make back. We made a \$30,000 record—this is what we can do where you make money."

Millard, surprisingly, isn't Simple's main A&R scout. Jeff Moseley, president of Simple's parent label INO, brought Phil Wickham to him, and Kipley and bandmate Mike Scheuchzer "told me about The Afters. Mike hears about 'em more than anybody. He's got a good knack for that. I hope he doesn't catch on to that and start expecting a paycheck," he laughs. **B.B.**

IS THE END OF THE WORLD...





AND IT KEEPS
GETTING
BETTER

BY: DAVID McCREARY
PHOTOS BY: DAVE HILL



You helped put **HAWK NELSON** on the cover of our Readers' Choice Awards issue this past February when you chose them as your "Favorite New Artist." Something tells us that won't be the band's only appearance on the front of our magazine either—not by a long shot.

Some bands get all the breaks.

In the case of Canadian-bred punk rock outfit Hawk Nelson, the last two years have been rife with the kind of milestone experiences most artists only dream about. Consider just a few of the opportunities served up to this crew since they crashed onto the Christian music scene in 2004: A live-performance appearance in a major film starring Rene Russo and Dennis Quaid (*Yours, Mine & Ours*); guest roles on the former NBC drama "American Dreams" as The Who—singing "My Generation," no less; song airplay during commercials for the 2004 Summer Olympics; and, last but not least, the recent designation as your "Favorite New Artist" in CCM's Readers' Choice Awards.

Hawk Nelson's meteoric rise has been extraordinary, to say the least. Here's a group whose debut project, *Letters to the President* (Tooth & Nail), has sold an impressive 115,000-plus copies. The band has also gotten ink everywhere from *Billboard* to *Tiger Beat*, not to mention a photo op in *Alternative Press* with supermodel Heidi Klum. And now, with sophomore effort *Smile, It's the End of the World* getting loads of positive buzz, one might think the trappings of success would usher in swelled egos, senses of entitlement and those ridiculous celebrity demands like requiring imported Finnish glacier water in their hotel room toilets.

Fortunately, for fans and tour managers alike, that assumption is dead wrong. In fact, of all the artists this music journalist has ever interviewed, these guys seem as unaffected as they come. Evidence of their blithesome spirit appeared near the end of a phone interview for this article, as bassist Daniel Biro said, "Call me when you come to Nashville, and we'll go get coffee...seriously." The energetic 24-year-old then proceeded to provide his cell phone number.

Hailing from a suburb of Ontario, Canada, Hawk Nelson originated while front man Jason Dunn, now 23, was still in high school. "I was 19 years old, and my lifelong dream was to be in a band," Dunn recalls. "Everyone told me I needed to have a 'Plan B,' but I never came up with one. I actually left my graduation early to play a show with Relient K."

The group's moniker was derived from a name Dunn made up while playing a Sony Playstation "2Xtreme" game. "All the guys thought it sounded pretty cool," Dunn says with a laugh. The name stuck.

Dunn says he never thought Hawk Nelson would go as far as it has, but he's always hoped for the best. "When you're a kid, you sit around and think about what it would be like to become famous," he admits before adding this perspective: "I think it's important to find something that makes you fulfilled. A lot of times that involves risk and challenge. But the one thing that matters most is that God is in it."

It's that kind of passion and exuberance that makes Hawk Nelson so endearing to its fans. Perhaps that's why the band's music has resonated so well in such a short amount of time. Grinding out one performance after another

in the independent Toronto music scene—including gigs at youth group functions, arcades and colleges—Hawk Nelson quickly developed a loyal following. They soon captured the attention of Trevor McNevean from the group Thousand Foot Krutch, whose industry contacts ultimately helped land the foursome on Tooth & Nail's roster. You know the rest of the story.

McNevean, who co-wrote and co-produced Hawk Nelson's debut, once again lends a hand in writing part of the band's new project. The group also brought back good friend Aaron Sprinkle to produce *Smile*. "The quality and production of this record represent a huge step up from our first effort," says Dunn. "The first record included a lot more of a pop sound, but we wanted to move in an edgier more rock-driven direction. Aaron did a good job helping us accomplish that goal."

Also adding to the heavier sonic output these days are the group's newest members, guitarist Jonathan Steingard and drummer Aaron "Squid" Tosti, a former member of multi-genre act Pax 217. According to Dunn, previous bandmates Dave Clark and Matt Paige left Hawk Nelson to pursue other interests. "Both guys were about to get married and decided they needed to be with their wives rather than hanging out with us," Dunn explains. "Being away from friends and family is difficult, but we feel God has called us to do it."

Sometimes personnel shifts can be devastating to a new band, but Hawk Nelson seems to be taking it in stride. Dunn says Steingard, 23, and Tosti, 22, are "super-talented players" who make him want to be a better musician. Biro agrees: "We're a stronger band today because Jon and Aaron have so much to offer. It's also cool that we all have different musical influences that we bring to the table. My favorite band is Goldfinger; Jonathan is into U2 and other types of Brit-rock; Aaron is into alt-rock and underground stuff. All that diversity helps shape our overall sound."

When it comes to the band's new disc, a collection of decidedly tuneful, yet hard-charging, songs reveals tremendous artistic growth. Tracks like "The One Thing I Have Left" and "Everything You Ever Wanted" showcase catchy melodies and buoyant, yet angst-filled, vocals resembling bands such as Simple Plan, Good Charlotte and MXPX.

The siblings who comprise Columbia/INO buzz band The Jonas Brothers were among the first to snatch up a copy of *Smile*. Co-lead vocalist Nicholas Jonas gives props to Hawk Nelson for "making music for God." And he's enthused to endorse *Smile*. "It truly rocks!" he says. "And it's great because it's relevant to teenage lives today."

Hawk Nelson offers some pleasant surprises on *Smile*, including Biro's favorite cut, "The Show," which features guest vocals from a barbershop quartet straight from the literal streets of Seattle, the same city where *Smile* was recorded. Biro explains: "We were down at Pikes Marketplace, and there were these homeless guys singing and trying to make a few bucks, so I approached them about being on the record. They're called Brother Willie and the Market Crew, and they came in the studio and just nailed it!"

While much of the album has a feel-good vibe, other selections contain messages of solace. Piano-driven ballad "Zero," for example, addresses the delicate subject of suicide. "It's about a friend and former co-worker of mine who

was a great athlete and had a lot going for him," Dunn shares. "But somewhere along the line he got depressed and took his own life. That really shook me."

Dunn says songs such as "Zero" give Hawk Nelson a unique platform from which to reach out to young people who might not otherwise respond. "Kids at shows tell us all the time that they are struggling and hurting," he says. "They need help, but often they don't want to talk to their parents. For whatever reason, a lot of teens feel like we are on the same wavelength. They pour their hearts out to us, and we try to help them realize that they have a greater reason and purpose for living. Every person has the capacity to be a world-changer for God."

Taking nothing for granted, the guys in Hawk Nelson appreciate the good fortune and experiences they've shared over the last few years. The challenge to soak it all in as they try to live in the moment is met with an attitude of thrilled expectancy tempered with humility.

"Every day I wake up, I realize that we are so undeserving of this," Dunn confesses. "We're just like every other band that's trying to get our music out there, but God's favor is on us. He keeps opening doors for us and blessing us with awesome opportunities, and we're going to keep taking them as long as He gives them to us."

With the members of Hawk Nelson, the more you get to know them and their music, the more you share the excitement for what's coming next. [ccm](#)



TWO UNKNOWN YET UNFORGETTABLE HAWK NELSON MOMENTS

While much has been reported about Hawk Nelson's television and motion picture exploits, here are two highlights you probably haven't seen—until now.

1. Nothing says, "Welcome to America" like being held up at gunpoint. During the band's first-ever tour in the United States, the guys stopped at a Waffle House in Hillsborough, N.C., to grab some late-night grub. Daniel Biro recalls the details: "We were having a bite to eat at 2 a.m., and these men come over from another table, point handguns in our faces and demand that we hand over our wallets. Long story short, they didn't take much from us; and, thankfully, no one got hurt. When we got out of there, we were just rejoicing that we were alive. That situation helped me gain a much deeper appreciation for life."

2. While working on the set of the Paramount Pictures movie *Yours, Mine & Ours*, the guys befriended well-known actress Rene Russo, a professing Christian. "She was so nice to us throughout the whole process," Biro says. Several weeks after production finished, two of them received an unexpected surprise. "She bought me and Jason John Eldredge's book *Wild at Heart* and mailed it to us," says a gleeful Biro. "I was like 'No way!' What an amazing woman!" **D.M.**



REAL

THE MEMBERS OF **SANCTUS REAL** FACE BIRTH, DEATH AND HUMAN

Photos By Dave Hill

From left: Chris Rohman, Mark Graalman, Dan Gartley and Matt Hammitt

LIFE

BROKENNESS ONLY TO DISCOVER **LOVE** AT THE ROOT OF IT ALL.



By: Brian Quincy Newcomb

"LIFE IS DIFFICULT." THAT'S THE OPENING SENTENCE OF M. SCOTT PECK'S LATE '70S POP-PSYCHOLOGY AND SELF-HELP BESTSELLER, *THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED*. WHILE THAT'S A TRUTH THAT SCRIPTURE SUPPORTS, AND MANY OF US IN OUR MORE CANDID MOMENTS WOULD HONESTLY ADMIT, IT'S NOT SOMETHING THAT APPEARS FRONT AND CENTER IN MOST OF TODAY'S CHRISTIAN SONGS, NOR IS IT A COMMON THEME ON CHRISTIAN MUSIC RADIO.

SANCTUS REAL may change that with the release of its third national studio album, *The Face of Love* (Sparrow). The disc opens with a heart-on-sleeve admission that "I'm not alright, I'm broken inside." For all the talk about transparency in ministry, is it really OK for Christian musicians to open up about their pain and longing, their brokenness and humanity?

Perhaps so. At press time the song "I'm Not Alright" had already climbed to No. 8 on *Radio & Records'* Christian pop (CHR) radio chart. And the life issues tackled on the rest of the album? If the quality of the music itself has anything to say about it, this disc's important themes will be heard by a distinctly larger audience than the band's known so far. When MercyMe guitarist Mike Scheuchzer recently remarked that *The Face of Love* is "hands down the strongest effort from Sanctus Real" and one of the year's best rock albums period, he spoke in tandem with music critics far and wide, whose responses seem unanimous.

A YEAR OF LIVING DANGEROUSLY

"When we first started working on this record, a lot was happening in our lives," states Sanctus Real singer Matt Hammitt matter-of-factly. "That took us a lot deeper than we were used to."

"It was a big year for us—big highs and big lows for everybody in the band," adds guitarist Chris Rohman. "Things happened to us that really changed who we were as people."

The year started with accolades and praise for the hard-working pop/rock quartet from Toledo, Ohio. The band was honored in the 2004 *CCM Magazine* Reader's Choice Awards as "Favorite New Artist," and *R&R* reported that Sanctus Real was the year's most played Christian Rock Radio act. In 2005 its *Fight the Tide* disc snagged the Dove Award for "Rock Album of the Year." But as John Lennon once said, life is what happens while you're making other plans.

It was also a year marked by change and turmoil, including personnel changes and personal challenges, reports Rohman: "Our bass player leaving was a mutual parting of ways, but that happened right as we were supposed to be writing and recording the record. [Bassist Steve Goodrum was subsequently replaced by Dan Gartley.]

"The biggest thing, was [Sanctus drummer] Mark Graalman's father passing away. We were all close to his dad—his was the youngest father among the four of us—it was very unexpected and quick. It was pretty traumatic, as Mark had gone home early from being on tour to be there with his wife for the birth of their first baby. Literally, the same day of the birth, they found out his dad had terminal cancer of the stomach. That really drained us emotionally."

Some make lemonade when life gets sour; some hide; songwriters tend to write songs. The members of Sanctus Real wrote "Benjamin," about this inevitable "circle of life." We're here for a short time, the song admits. God gives and takes life, and if we're here to love, we ought to get busy about it—not take this gift for granted. Other songs

express less resolve and understanding.

Hammit—whose grandmother, to whom he was very close, also died during this period—says, "We had a pretty crazy number of both great things and terrible things all happen in a very compact window of time, which just happened to be when we were scheduled to finish writing our new record.

"The feeling of brokenness in the band left us in a place to make some major decisions about how we were going to allow these things to influence us. That's when Peter York [president of EMI CMG Label Group] gave me Brennan Manning's book *The Signature of Jesus*. I was also reading *Soul Survivor* by Phillip Yancey. Reading about other peoples' trials and struggles, it felt like a brand new revelation of the personality of Jesus Christ to me, personally, and this was a real time of healing for me, when I realized just how much Jesus loved me.

"And I also came to the realization of just how much Jesus expects me to love other people. All that led to the writing of *The Face of Love*. It is about Christ's love and his life, but it's also about us doing what He's called us to do—to love and serve people and be the face of Christ in the world."

BEING HUMAN, EMBRACING VULNERABILITY

The roots of this revival were a hunger for spiritual honesty and a love for music that matters. "We're not trained musicians," explains Rohman. "We're just four guys who played together in a basement. We've just taken the little pieces we have and tried to bring it together and craft something that's relevant, but it's slop-rock really. You start out with just a guitar riff; but you get in the studio, and a melody comes to the surface. And there's heart behind it."

While known for No. 1 Christian rock radio hits such as "Everything About You," "The Fight Song" and U2 cover "Beautiful Day," the band started in that basement playing Weezer songs and doing classic rock covers of Cream and James Gang. Just now in their mid-20s Rohman says, "I credit my dad for that. He had quite the record collection. Growing up, way before I ever knew who Amy Grant was, my base influence was Tom Petty."

Hammit, who acknowledges the band Death Cab for Cutie as a songwriting influence, suggests, "A lot of our songs on *Say It Loud* were written over our six years as an independent band. We were just being kids. It was crank the amps to 10 and just have a good time, but do it for the right reasons. Our heart was into getting the message out there, but we had no idea how to say it, how to present a clear, concise message.

"On the second record, we were trying to craft lyrics better. We'd learned a bit more about life and about how to write, but it was more topical. We were addressing themes we thought were important, things we wanted to think and talk about.

"The difference between those records and *The Face of Love* is that every single song on the new record was not only derived from a personal experience, feeling or emotion that we were involved in while making this

record, but we also knew how to say it a lot better. I think we've learned a lot about the process."

GROWING UP BEATS THE ALTERNATIVES

"I think this is definitely our coming-of-age record," says Rohman. "Writing music had come to be more like a habit. This time, everything was very intentional. It's real important that the music we put out there is honest. As a Christian, you reach the time to grow up, when you experience the real hardships in life that all of us have to face. It was that time for us—we saw a lot of heartache last year and experienced a lot of growth because of it. In the midst of the ups and downs of life, there are times to be grateful, and there are times to be sad."

"There are really two sides to the record," concludes Hammit. "A portion of these songs is derived directly from experiences, watching friends get divorced, and dealing with the issue of loving each other during hard times, being honest about our weaknesses. Then there's this other part of the record, which is literally just us in awe and wonder of the person of Jesus Christ—songs like 'Thank You,' 'Magnetic' and 'The Face of Love.'"

Surprisingly, he continues, "Folks have been real responsive to 'I'm Not Alright.' They have been telling us that they've just wanted to come out and say that sometimes it's not OK, that they are feeling a bit broken at times. It's not so easy to say that in the church. People are drawn to the idea that we don't have to sugarcoat life all the time, that we can be honest and don't have to pretend that it's always OK with each other. There are a lot of fears that creep into our lives as Christians that revolve around pleasing people. I think we're afraid to get real about certain issues.

"Part of the healing that happened in my life," says Hammit, who had a daughter, Emmerson Mae, two weeks prior to our interview, "came in a way that I wasn't really expecting. I was looking for a healing that revolved around mourning the death of Mark's dad and my grandmother, but, instead, I got a brand new perception of who Jesus Christ really was and what His love means.

"We offer up these simple prayers, 'give us peace,' 'ease our pain,' 'find us a bass player,' 'solve our problems,' but what I got instead was a dose of reality. For the first time in my life I began to learn how to love people. I'll be honest: I did not know how to love people the way Jesus wanted me to love people. I could say it, but deep in my heart I was judging people. Brennan Manning says until we can really accept who Jesus was and His unconditional love for us, we're always going to be afraid of judgment, and we're always going to judge other people. To me, this simple concept was missed for most of my life; and in my heart and mind I was often looking down on people whether I recognized it or not. That's the main idea behind *The Face of Love*, that no one is too lost for me to love, no one is too low for me to serve." **ccm**

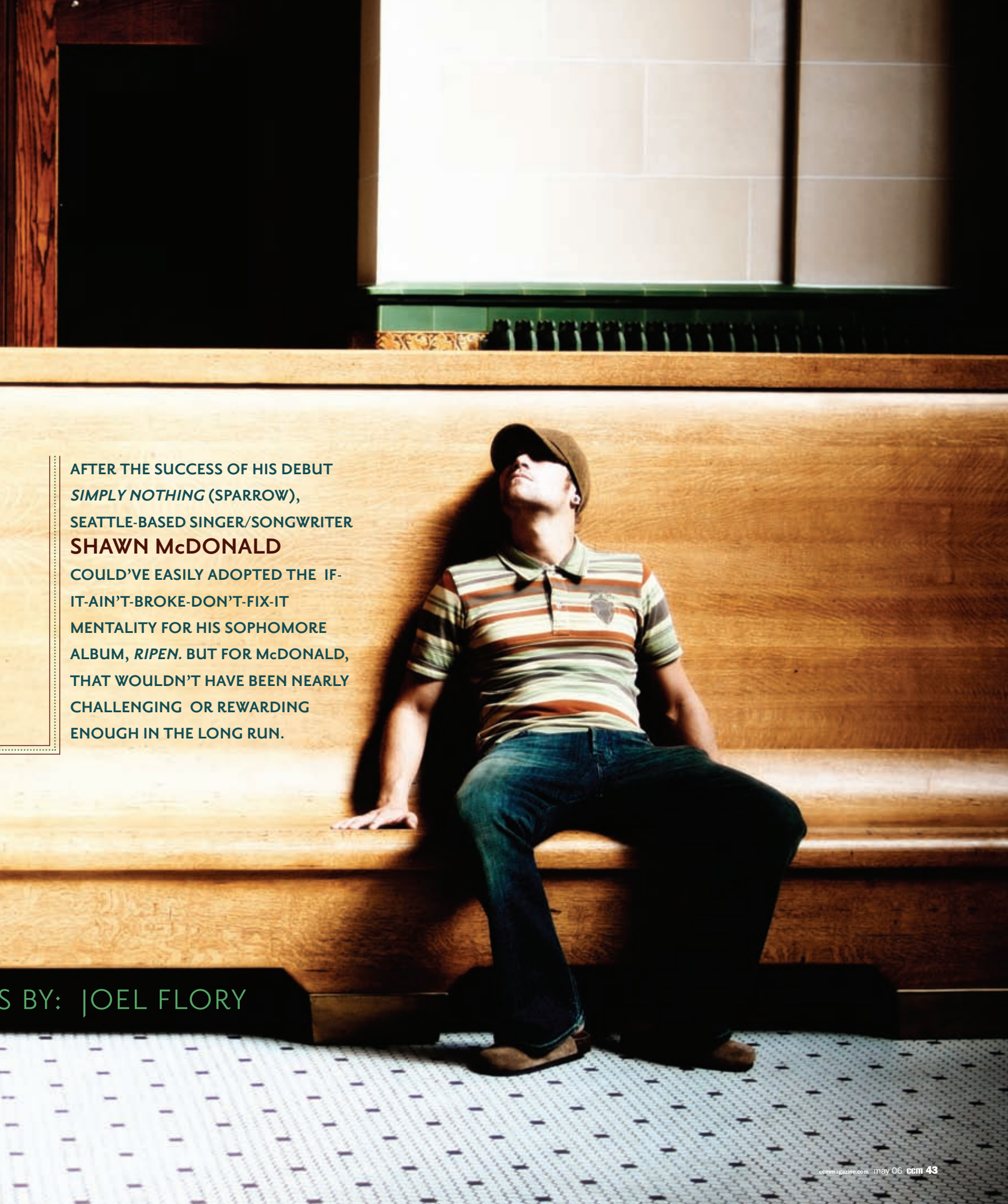
A photograph of a light-colored wooden bench in a room. In the background, there is a green radiator and a window with dark wood framing. The bench is the central focus, and the text is overlaid on it.

Rebel

WITH A CAUSE

BY: CHRISTA A. BANISTER

PHOTO:



AFTER THE SUCCESS OF HIS DEBUT *SIMPLY NOTHING* (SPARROW), SEATTLE-BASED SINGER/SONGWRITER **SHAWN McDONALD** COULD'VE EASILY ADOPTED THE IF-IT-AIN'T-BROKE-DON'T-FIX-IT MENTALITY FOR HIS SOPHOMORE ALBUM, *RIPEN*. BUT FOR McDONALD, THAT WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN NEARLY CHALLENGING OR REWARDING ENOUGH IN THE LONG RUN.

BY: JOEL FLORY

Soft-spoken, sincere and even a little shy in the spotlight, Shawn McDonald hardly seems the rebellious type. But that's exactly how he describes his attitude about making his second studio disc, *Ripen* (Sparrow). "I think I got a little risky this time," he says by phone from Ashland, Ore., where he's playing a show later this particular Monday evening. "I guess I'm a rebel in the sense that if people expect something from me, I'll naturally go a different way."

While he's quick to admit he's not into switching things for shock value's sake, McDonald does know that fans might be a little surprised by the lack of blatant pop songs on *Ripen*. "With this record, I think a lot of kids are like, 'Where are the songs like 'Take My Hand' and 'Gravity?'" he confesses. "Basically, they aren't here. They will probably show up again on future records, but coming into this record, I was like, 'You know, it's not about writing catchy pop songs. It's about moving the heart.' So I tried to make a record that was genuine, about who I am and what I wanted to say. And I believe and pray that, if people take the time with these songs, God will use them to draw people closer to Him."

Slow Train Coming

When writing songs for *Ripen*, McDonald is the first to admit that he was a little intimidated by the process. Before he signed with Sparrow Records and released *Simply Nothing*, McDonald had several years, rather than several months, to craft his material. With *Ripen*, however, he was on a much tighter schedule. "I definitely had to be a little more intentional and serious about my writing this time," he says. "But that was a good thing ultimately because it really stretched me."

And it doesn't hurt, either, that he had some spectacular scenery to be inspired by as he wrote about a third of the tracks (including *Ripen*'s moody, heaven-minded opener, "I Want to Be Ready") on a train ride from Germany to France. "Basically, any time I would think of a topic I'd want to write about, I would just open up a new Word document on my computer and write. Then any time I'd get stumped, I'd just move on to the next one. Some songs were finished, some weren't," McDonald relays. "I was going through a really emotional period. I was passing some really incredible history—some old, old buildings, cathedrals and countrysides. I think I was overwhelmed because it was all so moving. Many of the songs were inspired during that time. Ultimately, Europe is such a different place than America, so enchanting."

Tying the songs of *Ripen* together are three interludes that showcase more of an experimental side of McDonald, whether it's the free-style rap of "Ramblings of a Beggar," the Revelation-inspired "The Rider on the White Horse" or the entrancing beats of "Imago." And stirring the pot up musically is something that McDonald aspired to do on *Ripen* with the acquisition of several new musical instruments—an Indonesian Timor guitar, a broken piano he picked up at a Seattle thrift store and several others he found at flea markets and, of course, on eBay. "That's part of making music; you can make music with anything. You could hit on the arm of a chair with sticks and get the kind of drum sound you like," McDonald says. "We really wanted something that wasn't typical for a studio recording and would also be really fun to play live."

He describes *Ripen* as "a journey over hills, down valleys and to new experiences." And for the optimum

listening experience, it's also a project that's meant to be enjoyed from start to finish. Yes, *Ripen* is an anomaly in the iPod generation where singles are often cherry-picked and downloaded without much regard for the rest of the disc. Fans know they'd be missing out to take such an approach with McDonald's work. Consider their response when *Ripen* released in March. The album debuted at No. 1 on the Christian retail chart and at No. 2 on *Billboard*'s Heatseeker chart, selling more than 9,300 copies its first week out.

So what is it about McDonald's music that sets him apart from the pack, that connects so deeply with audiences? "He's doing something that other people aren't doing," says fellow recording artist Bebo Norman. "Shawn doesn't sound like anybody else; and that, to me, is always a breath of fresh air. He's one of the most talented and creative artists in Christian music. Artistically, I have more respect for him than I know what to do with."

Norman is also quick to point to the influence McDonald has had on him. "On a personal level, I just valued my time with him when we were on tour," he says. "I walked away from that looking at things differently—in a good way, and in a healthy way. Shawn gave me a different perspective on what he was trying to pursue and what I should try to pursue, even, in music."

Ch-Ch-Changes

It comes as no surprise that a Shawn McDonald recording is going to reflect deeply on the artist's personal life. "God is growing me up, which is why the album is called *Ripen*," McDonald explains. "I don't feel like the same person I was five years ago. And rightly so—I shouldn't be. I'm walking with God, and He's teaching me new things. My vision, my heart, all these things are being molded to be more like Christ. This is a journey, and I want people to come along with me. Let's learn; let's grow; and let's do this together."

Also providing McDonald a new perspective on life and music is his recent marriage to Kate that's just hit the nine-month mark. "Marriage has made me have to learn to be a man—to buck up and lead. I think it's taught me a lot of leadership and really stretched my compassion level, just my love in general for people," he says. "Marriage is hard. It's hands down the hardest thing I've ever done. I can honestly say that I think our first year is going to be one of our hardest. I'm on the road all the time, and on top of that, there's the fact that I'm on a stage and get a lot of attention. But even though it's been kind of a rough first year, we're making it through. And it's good; and it just keeps getting better. But I think it's really crazy, the part that God has really softened my heart. I don't know that I saw that coming."

And in a superficial world, it's transparency like this that's really the most rebellious—and equally refreshing—thing about McDonald, a quality the likes of James Dean probably wished he'd had a little more of. **ccm**

For more information on McDonald, check out shawnmcdonaldmusic.com.



THE
BEHIND
THE

MAIN MUSIK

BY: GREGORY RUMBURG



SAFE TO SAY, NO RIGHT-THINKING RECORD COMPANY DREAMED UP THIS PLAN for a PowerPoint presentation: Seeking white male from the Southeastern region of the United States for a national, Christian hip-hop career. Still, KJ-52 got a shot. "When I tell strangers what I do, I might as well have told them I train pygmy rattlesnakes for the circus," the rapper admits. "My whole life has pretty much been an uphill battle trying to explain what I do or where I'm from or what happened. It's definitely been a challenge."

KJ's a scrapper, fully aware he didn't start out as the most talented kid in the class. But his drive and character pushed him to hone his skills—toil that's paying off today. His lauded 2005 autobiographical effort *Behind the Musik (A Boy Named Jonah)* (BEC) helped push the former youth minister's career totals to more than a half-million records sold. The tally adds credence to his 2004 Dove Award for "Rap/Hip-hop Album of the Year" (*It's Pronounced Five Two*) and to his pair of recent Gospel Music Award nominations. With some 400,000 Delta Skymiles over the last couple of years under his three-cell-phone-a-day belt, the avid podcaster works more touring options than ever before.

With a new project dropping May 2, *KJ-52 Remixed*, KJ fans are up to their dickies in his celebratory beats—forcing proverbial naysayers to take a second look. Case in point: KJ-52 will celebrate six years in the biz next month, yet this is his first real *CCM Magazine* feature.

So what gives? Studio whiz Aaron Sprinkle, who co-produced *Behind the Musik*, points to the fact that KJ "works so hard to connect with fans.

"It's good to see him start to be recognized for that," he adds.

Logically, it is indeed the hard work. Where reason is defied, KJ offers this perspective: "It proves that God takes the foolish things of the world and does something with it."

"BEATING THE ODDS" HEADLINES THE NARRATIVE BEHIND KJ-52'S MUSIC, driven by unique, personal storylines.

After Essential Records rolled the dice on KJ with 2000's *7th Avenue*, reviews were mixed; and fans were slow to warm up to the debut. Because of resulting poor record sales, KJ was amicably dropped from the label. Determined, he shopped for a new deal. Only the avant-garde Tooth & Nail Records would open its doors, via BEC/Uprok Records. But it was just the kind of foolishness that was necessary for *Collaborations*, a turning point that gave the rapper a new start and illustrated what KJ does best: fight for what he believes in.

It's a spirit of living he garnered during an unconventional childhood as Jonah Sorrentino, KJ's given name. Growing up, he was permitted to call his parents by their first names, Richard and Lana, centerpieces of *Behind the Musik*. The two met as art students in Brooklyn during the height of the '70s downtown pop art movement. Adoring Soho culture yet pining for Florida, the hippies trekked to the unlikely Ebor City, Fla.—"pretty much the ghetto of Tampa," says KJ—to open an art studio. Ebor City's 7th Avenue neighborhood fashioned a blend of gritty urban and artistic living; and though the couple split after their first year there, KJ remembers his parents created a nurturing, creative environment. Among mostly black and Cuban neighbors, and to sonic wallpaper at home formed by Bob Dylan, Bob Marley and Top 40 '80s music such as The Police, KJ pursued drawing, modeling and acting as expressions of his artistic nature. But what KJ embraced most there was an appreciation for culture.

"I learned a lot from my dad, from his ability to relate to so many different types of people. And even though I was the only white kid, I never stopped to think [about it]," he says.

Around the age of 12, KJ, like most middle-school-aged youth, longed to fit into a crowd, something that had eluded him as he shuttled between Ebor City, where his dad still lived, and Tampa's suburbs, where his mom had started a new life. And like some youth, that grasping for acceptance drove the pre-teen toward unhealthy habits. He went from being an A student to fielding D's and F's. Spiraling out of control, KJ got into the party scene, getting drunk and chasing girls, and ran away from home twice. Two influences helped propel him out of the chaos.

First, KJ latched onto hip-hop, from the more positive work of Kid 'N Play and Rob Base & DJ E-Z Rock to the more militant tracks of Public Enemy and Boogie Down Productions. "So much of it was about empowerment," he explains, "and I think maybe there was a part of me that really wanted that." Inspired, KJ tackled *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* for a school book report—not exactly light reading.

At 12, empowerment came from a different angle, thanks, in part, to a summertime conversation KJ had about God with his cousin. Christianity was largely foreign to the teen; the circumstances of his life wooed him to flirt with atheism. But later that summer, after KJ moved with his mom and stepfather to Cape Coral in southwest Florida, KJ's mind eased into the idea that God wasn't as capricious as He had seemed. Soon, KJ found a local Top 40 radio station playing hip-hop and another airing a slate of broadcast ministries such as Focus on the Family, Charles Stanley and Adrian Rogers of "Love Worth Finding" notoriety. One night, listening to Rogers, KJ's heart responded. "I got down on my knees in my bedroom and asked Christ into my life," he says. He soon joined a local church, and, "Once I got a Bible, I read through it in six months. I was that hungry." Eventually KJ swapped mainstream hip-hop for the work of pioneering Christian acts such as Dynamic Twins, SFC and PID—a legacy he's proud to continue today.

So, with the long winter of his music career behind him and spring's new beginnings rooted and thriving in *Behind the Musik*, the cusp of summer presents a good time to take stock, consider the ground covered—but never slow down. *KJ-52 Remixed* releases this month with 14 songs from the artist's four previous projects, including "Are You Real" and "Dear Slim Part 2," an epistle to Eminem and a chapter of the widely reported, but largely misunderstood, squabble between the rappers. Two other songs, "Napoleon Dynamite" and "Washed Up," were previously only available on a limited-edition project. For the first time, KJ worked as his own producer on the preponderance of the record.

"I think I'm at the best point I've ever been at. It's funny because sometimes I think, *I turn 30 this year, so what am I doing still rapping?*" he laughs. "But I really feel like I've hit my stride. I feel like I'm in the best place I've ever been in."

THERE'S AN OSCAR-WINNING SONG POPULAR TODAY...CAN'T QUITE remember the hook, but it's something like, "It's hard out here eatin' shrimp." And if anyone can relate to how hard it is to eat shrimp in a meat-and-potatoes kind of world, it's a white rapper from Florida.

"I know all my criticisms," KJ says. "At the end of the day, I make music for my God and my fans, and that's it. The more I read the Word, the more I realize God has the habit of picking some very unusual people to work with." A battle the soul's determined to win. **CCM**

TWO years ago, HE WON THE 1ST **DOVE**
AWARD in TOOTH & NAIL RECORDS' history. Then this year
CCM readers crowned HIM THEIR "FAVORITE HIP-HOP ARTIST."
POPULAR?
INDEED, BUT HOW WELL DO WE REALLY KNOW
JONAH SORRENTINO?

LITTRELL'S HOME RUN

AC POP'S KNIGHT IN SHINING ARMOR ARRIVES JUST IN TIME...



File under:
Pop

Grade: A

BRIAN LITTRELL

Welcome Home

Reunion

PASS HIM THE TORCH

Whenever an artist from another musical genre records an album for the Christian market, it's generally met with a little skepticism. Some people tend to question motive and intent and wonder why they haven't been singing for the home team all along. Well, one listen to Backstreet Boy Brian Littrell's

Reunion album, *Welcome Home*, should silence critics. He paved the way for this release last year with his chart-topping remake of Michael English's "In Christ Alone," a Dove-nominated track off the *WoW #1s* album.

Truth be told, Littrell's solo debut album couldn't come at a more critical time for Christian pop music. In response to album sales trends, almost every record label has now turned its attention away from new adult contemporary pop artists. Most, but not quite all. Reunion Records, which launched in the early '80s with future AC pop giants Michael W. Smith and Kathy Troccoli, may be the genre's last great champion. The label recently signed AC pop fave Cindy Morgan and brought us her first album in five years, *Postcards*, and then in March introduced young AC talent Ana Laura via her

self-titled debut. With other labels all but abandoning the genre, Reunion Records is in a prime position to fill the expanding void.

Enter Brian Littrell. His new disc may not only fill the void, it might single-handedly resuscitate the embers of AC pop. *Welcome Home* is filled with powerful songs that linger with the listener long after the CD has finished. "Wish" is a beautiful ballad that speaks of how wonderful it would have been to see Jesus as He was growing up, living out His calling and fulfilling God's plan. "We Lift You Up" is a vibrant worship song with a soulful edge. "Jesus Loves You" is a stunning a cappella number featuring Take 6. It also includes an adorable intro and outro from Littrell's 3-year-old son Baylee. (OK, I'm a mom, so I loved this!) "Angels and Heroes" is an amazing song about the complexities of our human nature, but the most emotionally riveting moment on the album is the poignant "Gone Without Goodbye." The first verse describes a mother holding a photo of her son and searching for him in the aftermath of Sept. 11. It's an incredible song, and Littrell delivers a beautiful performance, wringing every drop of emotion from the lyric without ever becoming maudlin.

Welcome Home showcases Littrell's skills as a songwriter as well as spotlights his amazing voice. He has the warmth and passion of a Sunday morning worship leader tempered with the pop sensibilities of a seasoned artist who, with the Backstreet Boys, has sold an astonishing 75 million records. It's a perfect combination. People are always asking which male artist has the voice, writing skills and integrity to follow in Steven Curtis Chapman's and Michael W. Smith's footsteps. In listening to this wonderful album, it's obvious Littrell is the perfect artist to carry the torch.

DEBORAH EVANS PRICE



MAT KEARNEY

Nothing Left to Lose

Aware/Columbia/Inpop

File under:
Modern Pop

Grade: **B+**

WALKING A FINE LINE

When newcomer Mat Kearney's debut album, *Bullet*, released in the fall of 2004, it signaled the arrival of a refreshing talent. Kearney's blend of spoken/rapped verses and melodic choruses built on ground laid by artists such as G. Love & Special Sauce and the curiously popular surfer-singer Jack Johnson. *Bullet* produced the Christian radio staple of the same name and saw Kearney tour with MuteMath, The Fray, Cary Brothers and others, as well as land a deal for the general market with ultra-smart Chicago label Aware Records (John Mayer, Train, Five For Fighting).

On *Nothing Left to Lose*, Kearney keeps five of *Bullet*'s tracks and adds another eight for good measure. Intact are the engaging and urgent rap/sung verses that expressed such personality and verve on the debut ("Undeniable," "Girl America," "Bullet," Renaissance"). Also on display is Kearney's own inner Chris Martin (Coldplay), with vocal and melodic sensibilities that come dangerously close to mimicry on a few songs ("Won't Back Down," "Nothing Left to Lose," "Crashing Down") and yet rise above cliché by sheer force of their fine execution.

Kearney is an able lyricist, painting highly personal pictures of broken-hearted people with great hope and declarations of fidelity to friends and faith. His finest lyrical gift is the ability to find evidence of divine attention all around, without being simplistic or intentionally obscure. His greatest missteps are in the aforementioned musical parroting of Coldplay on a few songs. It is with those that he loses the urgency of his earlier material and can't quite find his own voice as he does convincingly on newer songs such as "What's a Boy to Do" and the beautifully simple "Where We Gonna Go From Here." Those songs deliver some of Kearney's deftest lyrical touches as well as a musical fingerprint that is all his own.

Kearney has talent for days and, at his finest, is one of the most refreshing voices in recent years. His blending of hip-hop sensibilities with singer/songwriter melodic



MAT KEARNEY

substance is among the finest of anyone working with those influences. He will be an exciting artist to follow, and, as he owns his strengths more completely, he may well be the one copied.

DAVE PALMER



THE ELMS

The Chess Hotel

Universal South/
EMI CMG

File under:
Rock

Grade: **A**

LOOK WHO'S BACK!

When The Elms first arrived on the scene in 2001 with *The Big Surprise*, the Indiana natives had the cool swagger of Brit rockers Oasis (minus the expletives and brotherly squabbles), catchy songs and a reputation for putting on a killer live show.

Then, a year later, they would more or less ditch the Brit rock for more muscular licks on *Truth, Soul, Rock & Roll*, share the stage with legendary rocker Peter Frampton and have their songs featured

in countless TV promos and movies. But despite the band's growing buzz, The Elms never seemed to fit comfortably in the Christian music industry. So, front man Owen Thomas and his cohorts eventually parted ways with Sparrow Records, continued to play shows and explored mainstream label opportunities.

Now four years later, the band—while still distributed to the Christian market by EMI CMG—is signed to Universal South and has teamed up with producer David Bianco (AC/DC, Tom Petty, Del Amitri) for *The Chess Hotel*. And for those who preferred the band's foray into heavier territory on "Speaking in Tongues" from *Truth, Soul, Rock & Roll*, you're really going to like what's here.

Sporting the vocal charisma of Mick Jagger, complete with the requisite howls and tongue-in-cheek lyrics to match, Thomas kicks things off with the authoritative one-two punch of "I Am the World" and "Who Puts Rock & Roll in Your Blood?" It's these tracks that firmly establish the loose rock vibe for the entire album: one that's Petty one moment, Black Rebel Motorcycle Club the next, with the old-school sensibilities of the Rolling Stones woven in.



But it's the band's first single, "Nothin' to Do With Love," where The Elms really shine. With an insanely hooky bass line and a relevant message about what love is—and isn't—Thomas branches out with a storyteller's approach to songwriting, one that adds vibrant color and accessibility to these snapshots from everyday life. From the ups and downs of relationships ("Makes Good Sense," "I Left My Body and Never Came Back" and, my favorite—the snide portrait of the significant other you'd never want—"She's Cold"), to dissatisfaction with life in a small town ("The Chess Hotel") to regret for past mistakes ("I've Been Wrong"), there's plenty of depth and vulnerability along with the ear candy, which isn't always the case in rock & roll.

While those looking for more specific faith references in the lyrics may be disappointed, the message of *The Chess Hotel* coincides with a worldview the band's embraced all along—one defined by truth, soul and rock & roll.

CHRISTA A. BANISTER

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SHAWN McDONALD



SHAWN
MCDONALD

Ripen
Sparrow

File under:
Singer/Songwriter

Grade: A

RIPE FOR THE PICKING

Following a critically acclaimed debut and a bold “live” second record, acoustic alternative worship wunderkind Shawn McDonald returns with *Ripen*, his third and strongest release yet.

On *Ripen*, McDonald stays true to his plaintive, searching lyrical style and his acoustic-driven arrangements. The operational principle for the artist and producers Christopher Stevens and Will Hunt seems to be *intimacy*. From the close-mike recording of his voice (so close it sounds at times like the microphone was actually inside McDonald’s mouth), to the soul-bearing and confessional lyrics, the record breaks right through the barrier between music and listener. Rich layers of cello, violin, viola and bass create a warm and rich backdrop for the acoustic guitar; and oddly effective loops and percussion programming add pop and drive to the songs.

Though shades of John Mayer or David Gray will no doubt be heard by some, by incorporating the live strings (often playing more like sound effects than a string section), haunting melodies and McDonald’s throaty vocals, a truly unique sound emerges.

Odd loops and imaginative string arrangements pervade the entire disc, adding wonderful color to the already strong songs. Steel guitar, accordion and hand percussion are enough to make the worship ballad “Pour Out” stand out as one of the most beautiful songs on the disc, while “Imago” offers a brightly colored Latin instrumental interlude. “Take Hold” uses cello and viola to create suspensions and resolutions that combine with perfect melodies and turn a relatively plain and predictable chorus lyric, “Take hold/Don’t give up/You got to make the best of what you got/Give it all your best shot,” into one of the high points of the disc.

With over 15 songs and more than an hour of playing time, Shawn McDonald weaves a fabric of music that functions as devotional art on one level and just plain beautiful music on another. Dark, often melancholy, but ultimately uplifting in a very “real world” way, *Ripen* proves that McDonald is a creative force to be reckoned with.

JOHN J. THOMPSON



STARFIELD

Beauty in the Broken
Sparrow

File under:
Pop-Rock/Worship

Grade: A-

A SHOOTING STAR WORTH CATCHING

Just when you thought the worship music bins had reached full capacity, along comes another disc vying for your attention. The good news: This is one worth adding to your collection.

Hailing from Canada, but sounding heavily Brit-influenced, worship/rock quartet Starfield hits full stride with its sophomore release, *Beauty in the Broken*. A satisfying set from start to finish, the album channels U2 and Delirious by offering dense soundscapes anchored with ringing guitars, straight-ahead rhythms and shimmering vocals.

The project is crisply produced by veterans Ed Cash (David Crowder Band, Steven Curtis Chapman, Bebo Norman) and Matt Bronleewe (Jars of Clay, Natalie Imbruglia, Michael W. Smith) and reveals a well-crafted assortment of worship-driven rock numbers. From the otherworldly arrangement of classic hymn “How Great



STARFIELD

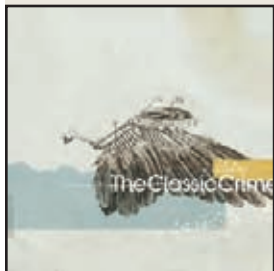
Thou Art” to the hook-laden resonance of “The Hand That Holds the World,” Starfield takes listeners on an enduring spiritual journey toward hope, reverence and greater dependence on Christ.

When it comes to what sets this disc apart from others of similar ilk, perhaps the most notable distinction is refreshingly heady lyrics. Consider this stanza from beguiling cut “Everything Is Beautiful”: “*Even when the tears are falling/I don’t need a miracle to believe/Even in the crashing down/I can hear redemption calling.*”

Elsewhere, Switchfoot-esque standout “Love Is the Reversal” emits verses like “*Welcome to the worldwide train wreck/Welcome to the come undone*” that will require more than a passive hearing to comprehend.

In a day when worship music purveyors are as common as reality television shows, consider Starfield one to put on the “must catch” list. And while there’s nothing exceedingly innovative about the group from a sonic perspective, it’s nice that our neighbors in the Great White North managed to provide a leading light to point us heavenward.

DAVID McCREARY



THE CLASSIC CRIME

Albatross
Tooth & Nail

File under:
Alternative Rock

Grade: **A-**

PASSING ON THIS DISC WOULD BE A CRIMINAL OFFENSE

The Classic Crime’s debut release on Tooth & Nail Records is an exercise in straightforward rock enlightenment. *Albatross* is dripping with Pacific Northwest sweat. The Classic Crime wears its Seattle influence on its sleeves while exploring the perimeters of unabashed melodic rock.

The disc’s opener is engaging; “The Fight” is a full-force guitar attack. Here, the band cuts a broad swath of melody with the snotty vocals of Matt McDonald leading the way. Equally engaging is the tune “Blisters and Coffee,” in which bassist Alan Clark sets up a fine groove that is flavored with heavy, melodic guitar tones. Pulling back the throttle, songs such as “Who Needs Air” drip with pop-rock orientation in mid-tempo splendor, while string nuances flavor the cuts nicely. At times,

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The Classic Crime even leans toward Green Day and Relient K offerings. Songs such as “All the Memories” are defined by punk guitar stylings while McDonald’s gritty vocals shine.

One of the disc’s finest moments comes courtesy of the feel-good vibe of “Headlights.” Here the band draws back the heaviness with a slower tempo and exposes a tender undercurrent of emotion. This cut is the perfect vehicle for McDonald’s falsetto, and he weaves an emotional vocal throughout. *Albatross* is the type of debut any band would hope for. The Classic Crime delivers songs with melodic heft. Each band member is proficient on his instrument, but collectively, they unite to weave together great songs. *Albatross* is a gritty statement, and The Classic Crime articulates it well.

STEVEN DOUGLAS LOSEY

described by Bart Millard as just that—*refreshing*. Millard and renowned producer Pete Kiple (MercyMe, The Afters) signed Wickham to their INO imprint, Simple Records, making Wickham the second signing to their label and the opening act for MercyMe’s highly anticipated fall tour.

The exclusive vibe the self-titled album puts out is one of worshipful reverence, but not in the traditional sense. With his influences dating back to his parents’ tenure as a part of the Jesus Movement in bands The Way and Parable and with tunes reminiscent of Coldplay, there’s a beautiful simplicity that makes Wickham’s album truly unique. The lyrics are vertical in nature, with the majority of the tracks being completely acoustic, stripped and raw with little or no help from BGVs. But perhaps that is what makes this debut so inviting. The ease with which the emotive lyrics drip off Wickham’s tongue really draws the listener in.

The first single, “Grace,” serves as a desperate plea to God for His grace to cover humanity and also sets the incredibly emotional tone for the rest of the disc. While there is not a definite theme that runs throughout the album, haunting melodies, with Wickham’s unforgettable vocals, make stand-out cuts such as “Mystery” and “I Adore You” sound both magical and intense.

The lyrics show a depth behind them that makes listeners see that Wickham is wise beyond his years. For instance, in the shimmering, “I Adore You,” Wickham writes, “*Mercy falls from your heart down on me/Glory streams from your face so lovely/A million words could not express your holiness/I adore you, I adore you.*” The imagery

that Wickham uses on songs such as the carousel-inducing dizziness of the album closer, “Holy, Holy, Holy,” engages the listener with Wickham painting vibrant word pictures, crooning, “*Lightning breaks around your throne/Streams of Glory bursting from your robe/You are the God in Heaven.*”

The only downfall to the album is that the emotive power of the music takes over after multiple listens. The lack of differentiation makes it hard to define what track you’re listening to at any given time. Plus, if it’s rockin’ worship you long for, you won’t find much upbeat music on this disc. But that’s not exactly what Wickham sought to accomplish here. He was after the sublime, unique, lyrical depth that can normally only be found among seasoned writers, and Wickham definitely achieved his purpose.

LINDSAY WILLIAMS



PHIL WICKHAM

Phil Wickham
Simple/INO

File under: Singer/Songwriter/Modern Worship
Grade: B+

EMOTIONAL WORSHIP TO STIR THE HEART...

If the front man of MercyMe lauds a new artist’s work as “the most refreshing music I’ve heard in years,” then one would be wise to stop and take notice. The music of 21-year-old Southern California native Phil Wickham has been





PETTIDEE

Thug Love
Beatmart

File under:
Hip-Hop

Grade: **B**

A FIRST FOR CHRISTIAN MUSIC?

Though still in its nascent stages, hip-hop within the realm of gospel music has its share of cross-country personalities, from hard-edged East Coast representatives (The Cross Movement) to idiosyncratic, party-loving West Coast ambassadors (L.A. Symphony, Tunnel Rats). Other parts of the union aren't far behind, with underground innovators Mars ILL representing for the ATL and Tennessee maestros GRITS making a noise of their own, both commercially and otherwise.

What Christian hip-hop has lacked for the longest time is a true-to-form Dirty South persona—someone with the guts and grillz (read: gold-plated teeth) to keep things trill, much like shouters Lil Jon, Petey Pablo and David Banner have in the mainstream. All of that is bound to change with *Thug Love*, the Beatmart debut by hip-hop veteran Pettidee.

Once content with standing in the shadow of GRITS and others—either as a producer or guest emcee—Pettidee comes out strong in this anomaly of a hip-hop album, one so crunk and aggressive it's hard to reconcile you're listening to Christian rap. Unlike faith-driven emcees who would rather keep things neat and inoffensive, Pettidee is unashamed to growl and yell in a fashion that's comparable to his deep-fried contemporaries, all the while gliding atop insane beats that seem custom-made for the club circuit.

But that's not to say everything on the album lacks subtlety. Even in the midst of this newfound no-nonsense ferocity, Pettidee takes a break from hurling heavy doses of truth in our faces and occasionally returns to his more staid beginnings. Pensive slow-burners "Can't Make It Without You" and "Learn to Let Go" are examples of such detours, which come as a breath of fresh air amid the relentless crunk anthems.

In the end, it's this balance that makes *Thug Love* a fine hip-hop album—perhaps not the Southern masterpiece Pettidee wants it to be, but, otherwise, a stepping stone in a genre that still has some way to go.

ANDREE FARIAS



PETTIDEE



MICHAEL CARD

The Hidden Face of God
Discovery House

File under:

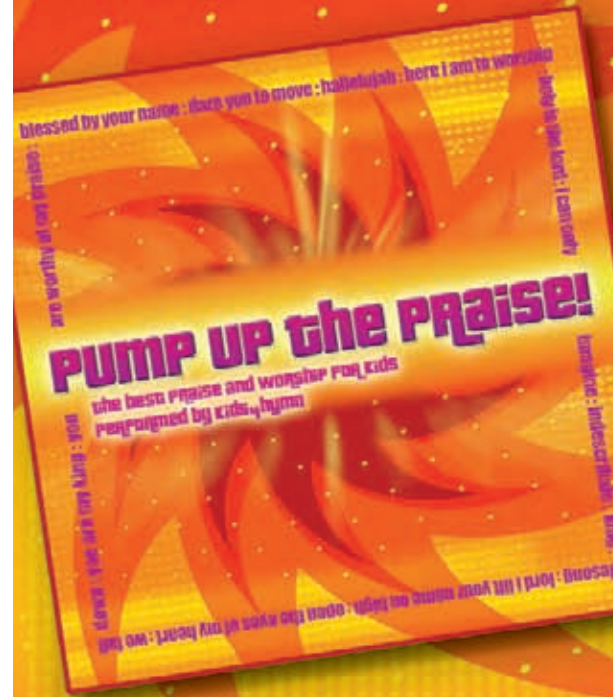
Acoustic Pop/Worship

Grade: **B+**

STILL DISCOVERING GOD'S FACE LONG AFTER "EL SHADDAI"

Back in the day—the early 1980s to be exact—singer/songwriter Michael Card established himself as one of the church's most talented treasures. His 1983 hit "El Shaddai" has been immortalized in countless services, regardless of the denomination, and paved the way for his 19 No. 1 hits during 20 plus years of peaceful pop with a praise bent. Those trends continue in classic Card fashion on *The Hidden Face of God*, the troubadour's latest diary of vulnerable entries (and his first album in three years). But even with the time off, he hasn't missed a single step thanks to an in-depth exploration that has resulted in a concept album of sorts relating to the topic of lament. Though the subject is rarely discussed on record (and perhaps light should have been shed on it sooner), the results are just as eye-opening as they are refreshing.

Culling his inspiration from the Psalms, plus biblical characters such as Saul, Job



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MICHAEL CARD

and even Jesus, the tunesmith addresses the varying emotions under the umbrella of lamentation, including anger, frustration, regret and grief toward God. Out of the seven self-written offerings, “Come Lift Up Your Sorrows” attempts to come to terms with a weary believer’s wilderness experience as “Older Than the Rain” traces the fact that human tears even preceded the earth’s rainfall. The banjo-tipped, African-American spiritual “Walk With Me, Lord” (with lead vocals by Reverend Denny Denson) further addresses perseverance, while the hymn “O Sacred Head, Now Wounded” marines in worshipful strums. All the while, this revered artist sticks to his cozy acoustic instrumentation and soothing pipes, making for yet another inviting listen and engaging topical exploration.

ANDY ARGYRAKIS



ELEVENTYSEVEN

And the Land of Fake Believe
Flicker

File under:
Punk/Pop

Grade: B

FROM ONE GENERATION TO ANOTHER...

When Matthew Langston sings “There’s nothing good left to imitate” in “More Than a Revolution,” the opening track of Eleventyseven’s debut disc, *And the Land of*

Fake Believe, perhaps he protests too loudly.

As much fun as this punk/pop trio’s punchy positivity is, originality is not its strong suit. Like The Ataris, All American Rejects, MXPX and Blink 182, this youthful Greenville, S.C.-based trio molds itself in great ‘80s and ‘90s bands such as Green Day and Material Issue, who themselves were a modern beat reflection on bands like The Ramones and The Kinks.

There’s plenty of good music, it appears, that’s worth imitating. And it’s true that Eleventyseven does do this genre extremely well, avoiding most of the pitfalls that lead to redundancy and complacency. OK, “Here With Me” is a tired love ballad, and Langston’s voice can get whiny; but for the most part, *Fake Believe* is catchy, witty and entertaining. If Dick Clark asked me, I’d give it an 83 (out of 100). It has a beat, and you can dance to it.

Lyrically, Langston (vocals and guitar), Caleb Satterfield (bass) and Jonathan Stephens (drums) aim to put a positive spin on earthy issues such as “Teenage Heartbreak.” Think imposing a Christian message into *The Breakfast Club*. “Nostalgia-topia” invites one to engage life to the fullest, and “MySpace” challenges the false intimacy created in cyberspace communications. “Odds and Even So’s” takes on the disillusionment that leads some to suicide. Consistently, the point is that God’s good world is here, and Christ makes it possible to live wholly and passionately. Point well taken.

BRIAN QUINCY NEWCOMB



ELEVENTYSEVEN

newreleases

MAY 2

- Michelle Bonnilla Dalton** *Phenomenal* (Cross Movement)
- The Elms** *Taste the Sky* (Selectric)
- Homeless J** *The Chess Hotel* (Universal South)
- Jonas Brothers** *3 Seconds to Gaze* (Selectric)
- KJ-52** *It’s About Time* (Columbia/INO)
- Brian Littrell** *KJ-52 Remixed* (BEC)
- Mars III** *Welcome Home* (Reunion)
- Passion Worship Band** *Pro Pain* (Gotee)
- Passion Worship Band** *One Day Live*
- Passion Worship Band** *CD/DVD Special Edition* (sixsteps)
- Passion Worship Band** *Sacred Revolution CD/DVD Special Edition* (sixsteps)

MAY 9

- Hyper Static Union** *Lifegiver* (RKT)
- Rachael Lampa** *Blessed: The Best of Rachael Lampa* (Word)
- The Longing** *The Longing* (Indelible Creative Group)
- Nicole C. Mullen** *Redeemer: The Best of Nicole C. Mullen* (Word)
- Jaci Velasquez** *On My Knees: The Best of Jaci Velasquez* (Word)

MAY 16

- Todd Agnew** *Reflection of Something Expanded Edition* (SRE/Ardent)
- Brenton Brown** *Everlasting God* (Sparrow)
- Eleventyseven** *And the Land of Fake Believe* (Flicker)
- Run Kid Run** *This Is Who We Are* (Tooth & Nail)
- Starfield** *Beauty in the Broken* (Sparrow)

MAY 23

- Carl Cartee** *Unfailing* (Springhill)
- The Classic Crime** *Albatross* (Tooth & Nail)
- Downhere** *Wide-Eyed and Mystified* (Centricity)



NEED TO BREATHE

It's my philosophy that anyone who writes for CCM Magazine must be a pretty good writer...know what I mean?! So, since she was the Contributing Editor to this page for quite some time, I know that **MARGARET BECKER** has the goods. Of course, not only is she a good writer, Margaret's quite the accomplished musician and artist. Thus, Margaret is the double whammy as far as this page is concerned—a writer *and* a musician...in a music magazine! And if that's not endorsement enough, let me say that her latest literary offering, *Coming Up for Air* (NavPress), is a breath of fresh air, especially for women who may be conflicted by the demands of life versus the need to live. After all, we too often view life as something that happens to us instead of something we do purposefully. No more! Take a deep breath, read this book and learn a few secrets to living a more satisfying, simplified and fruitful existence.



THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE

We all know that kids LOVE books about lions and tigers and bears (and lightning bugs). Oh my! **MARY BETH & STEVEN CURTIS CHAPMAN** are back with the third bundle of joy in their series of children's books named after Shaohannah (Shaoey), their first adopted daughter. This one's titled *Shaoy and Dot: A Thunder and Lightning Bug Story* (Tommy Nelson). Like Dr. Seuss, much children's literature is not just for children...and this is no exception. It's a great read at any age! And, yes...it's *that* Steven Curtis Chapman. Very musical. 'Nuff said.



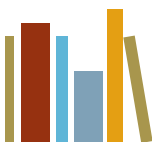
HOME, SWEET HOME

Just when you thought it was safe to go back to the bookstore! That's right! Your two favorite thrills-and-chills writers—**FRANK PERETTI** and **TED DEKKER**—are BACK! What's more, they've teamed up to write *House* (WestBow Press/Thomas Nelson)! (I can hear you now, "No way!") Way! The action begins in rural Alabama—and, as a proud native Alabamian myself, let me just say that's scary enough! (Yes, I'm kidding! Don't send me threatening emails!)—where two couples are stranded at an empty (or *is* it?) antebellum hotel. Let the mayhem ensue! And, as a complete *non sequitur* for all you crazy music fans, did you know that Peretti and Dekker are quite the musical gents, themselves? True dat! Frank Peretti is a fierce banjo player and lives to jam with his bluegrass band, Northern Cross. Oh, and Ted Dekker can't even begin to write anything unless the rock music is a blarin' in the background!



GOING SOUL-O

MELANIE WELLS returns with the second book in her "Day of Evil" series, *The Soul Hunter* (Multnomah). Come on, folks. If you're a fan of TV's hit shows "Medium," "The Ghost Whisperer" or "Supernatural," then a set of books centered upon spiritual warfare in a series dubbed the "Day of Evil" has your name written all over it! And, just for good measure, the author is also an accomplished musician. Melanie's a fiddle player, no less, who attended school on a music scholarship—where she proceeded to earn an English degree. (English majors of the world unite!) No wonder her writing flows together like a haunting melody!



B(u)y the Book

Other Titles of Interest



Having been a novelist for just seven years, **KAREN KINGSBURY** already has four million books in print! Also, *Time Magazine* has dubbed her the "Queen of Christian romance." And *Divine* (Tyndale)—a contemporary portrayal of Mary Magdalene—has released just in time for all those interested in the debates surrounding Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*.



Check out the latest additions to Nelson's extremely popular BibleZines! *Becoming 2: The Complete New Testament* (Nelson Bibles) is written for women, and *Refuel 2: The Complete New Testament* (Nelson Bibles) is geared toward teen guys. See! Magazines are great literature!



Artist and writer **KIM THOMAS** (of Say-So fame) takes a look at ideas of community, identity and acceptance through the lens of a potluck dinner in her new book, *Potluck: Parables of Giving, Taking, and Belonging* (WaterBrook Press). (By the way, Kim's artwork was featured on the *City on a Hill* album covers!)



SONGS FROM THE VOICE

SONGS FROM THE VOICE, VOLUME 1 IS A NEW COMPILATION ALBUM FEATURING PERFORMANCES BY A WIDE VARIETY OF ARTISTS SUCH AS DEREK WEBB, SARA GROVES, ROBBIE SEAY BAND AND INDIE FAVES WATERDEEP AND SANDRA McCracken. THE DISC CONTAINS 13 ORIGINAL SONGS INSPIRED BY SELECTED PSALMS FROM A NEW CONTEMPORARY RENDERING OF THE BIBLE CALLED THE VOICE. THE RECORDING ITSELF IS A BLEND OF WORSHIP AND COLLABORATION, AND THE MAJORITY OF THE FEATURED ARTISTS LENT THEIR MUSICAL AND VOCAL SKILLS TO EACH TRACK RESULTING IN A WONDERFULLY FRESH SOUND.

Clockwise from top left: Sara Groves, Derek Webb, *Songs from the Voice, Volume 1* cover art, Robbie Seay Band

THE INSPIRATION::

The team writing *The Voice* brings a unique combination of gifts to the project, including an award-winning fiction writer, an acclaimed poet, a pastor renowned for using art and narrative in his preaching and teaching, Greek and Hebrew authorities and biblical scholars. The result is a modern expression of the Bible's timeless narrative that retains the passion, grit, humor and beauty that is sometimes lost in the translation process.

CAPTURING A SOUND::

DON CHAFFER, who produced and mixed *Songs from the Voice, Volume 1*, is probably best known for his band **WATERDEEP**, which he has co-fronted with his wife, **LORI CHAFFER**, for the past decade. Waterdeep released two successful worship albums, and Don co-penned the **THIRD DAY** worship hit "You Are So Good to Me," from the *Offerings II: All I Have to Give* (Essential) album. So bringing him in to helm *The Voice* project made perfect sense.



Don chose his hometown studio, The Culture House Studios in Kansas City, to record and mix the album. *The Voice* was recorded in just four days, and the studio's large tracking space and abundance of gear were key factors in allowing up to 17 musicians to perform simultaneously. Don brought me in to engineer the project. When he shared his vision of recording the entire album, including all of the lead and backing vocals as complete performances without any overdubs, I was beside myself.



He explains what inspired him to make the record this way: "Madness. [pause] No, really, I wanted to have the experience today that people used to have all the time, tracking together live in the studio; and I thought this would underscore the communal aspect of the record." Having this many people recording at the same time could be a nightmare. Don says the biggest technical challenge of the project was organization. "Because we don't do it this way very often, we're not used to planning for what something is going to sound like once and for all," he says.

Deciding what artists were going to be involved with *The Voice* album was also a challenge. Don cites the factors that went into deciding who would be invited to participate: "Friendship—people we thought would be into the aim of the project and who could handle the pressure of tracking live."

I have never recorded as many different instruments in so few days as I did with this project, but the Brickman drum kit (which is actually a drum set made of a bunch of various sized aluminum pails) was easily the most bizarre of the bunch. Don recounts how this whole thing came into existence: "**GREG LAFOLLETTE**'s (Don's second engineer) family builds race cars, and I was desperate to find something cool for them to build for us to use. And we ended up with a drum kit made out of pails."

>> SOME OF THE MUSICAL GEMS USED TO MAKE SONGS FROM THE VOICE:

- Sequential Circuits Prophet-600
- Yamaha C-7 Grand Piano
- Upright Piano (found by Don Chaffer on a neighbor's porch)
- '63 Guild Jet Star Guitar (with flatwounds)
- Rogue Bass
- Yamaha Omnichord
- Hand-Crafted Autoharp
- Waterman 7-String Acoustic Guitar (g-string octave)
- Huss & Dalton Acoustic Guitar
- 60s Ludwig Club kit
- 60s Kay Mandolin
- Silvertone 1492 Guitar
- G-Force MTron Plug-in
- Pink Sparkle Custom Shop Telecaster '98
- K.C. Stringworks Upright Bass
- The Brickman Drum Kit



>> SOME OF THE MICS USED TO CAPTURE THE PROJECT:

- Heil PR-30 & PR-40
- Royer R-121, R-122, SF-1 & SF-12
- Audio Technica AT4050
- Lawson L47



Russ Long is an award-winning recording engineer who has helmed gold and platinum albums by Sixpence None the Richer and Newsboys as well as recordings by Relient K, Wilco, Phil Keaggy, Over the Rhine and others. Russ recently created an educational DVD on studio engineering tailored for singers, songwriters and home studio enthusiasts. For more information visit audioinstruction.com.



All concert photos by Andy Argyrakis



From left: Mac Powell, David Carr, Mark Lee, Brad Avery, David Crowder

THIRD DAY/DAVID CROWDER BAND: "WHEREVER YOU ARE TOUR"

EMENS AUDITORIUM | MUNCIE, IN—FEBRUARY 23, 2006

There are several sides to **THIRD DAY** that might appear on a concert program, including the raucous rock & roll blueprints from which they were birthed, worship reflections from two *Offerings* praise projects and cries for peace and consolation from the new disc *Wherever You Are* (Essential). But rather than simply sticking with one route, members turned in a set that weighed equally on all three areas, resulting in a meaningful and moving experience that started with the snarling "Tunnel," a Southern-coated cover of Rich Mullins' "Creed" and the flavorful "I Got a Feeling" from 2004's *Wire*. And just when it seemed the pressure cooker of meaty riffs would let up, the band blazed into one of its most revered deep cuts, "Consuming Fire," exploding with amplifier-induced mayhem and Mac Powell's husky vocals.

Shortly after that rampage, the front man charmed the crowd with some commentary about another classic. "This is one we haven't done in a very long time," he admitted while introducing "Thief." "It's one we've had a lot of requests for, so this goes out to all the old-schoolers out there." The track not only resonated with fans of the group's self-titled CD, but rang true with younger listeners, thanks to its chilling keyboard accompaniment. That introspective vibe continued as the gang stripped down for the unplugged "I've Always Loved You" and "Your Love Oh Lord." The segment also featured Crowder as a special surprise guest for a Grand Ole Opry-style hoedown on "I Saw the Light."

New cuts such as "Mountain of God" and "Cry Out to Jesus" provided examples of hope and comfort, with the latter being an anthem of sorts in the wake of the various hurricanes and other recent international ordeals. Further displays of worship included the acoustic ballad "Show Me Your Glory" and *City on a Hill* standard "God of

Wonders"; and the concert closed with the communal bang of "Come Together." Although switching between all these directives made for an entrancing evening, a drawback was Third Day's lack of material from its first few albums. Aside from the handful of aforementioned cuts from "back in the day," the bulk of the show was cemented in the 2000s. Yet even with a forward-focused agenda, the Atlanta-based outfit is still an explosive fireball of fun, tenaciously blazing through two hours with a wide variety of aesthetics.

Prior to the headliners, Crowder and his eponymous band delivered worshipful directives with boomerang blasts of corporate praise. As the words were flashed behind the band on a jumbo screen, fans joined together for sing-a-longs through "No One Like You," "Here Is Our King" and "O Praise Him," which mixed rock and electronic elements. At one point, the bearded, spiky-haired front man introduced a keytar to the audience, a delightfully '80s instrument he reported he bought off eBay. It was a fitting snapshot of his comical, yet sincere, personality that has driven the group from its undiscovered indie days to a nationally known unit poised for continued creativity.

HERE AND THERE

ARE YOU WITHIN A DAY'S DRIVE?

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A lengthy list of artists has graced the stage, including **SWITCHFOOT, MERCYME, KEVIN MAX, JOY ELECTRIC, DASHBOARD CONFESSIONAL** and **NICHOLE NORDEMAN**, who released a CD called *Live at The Door* (Sparrow) in 2003. Besides bringing in such heavy-hitting marquee names, The Door is also committed to breaking new bands and often showcases indie acts from all across the country. And for concertgoers with diversified tastes, variety is spread throughout the premises with a large concert hall, a theatre and a coffee house called, "The Love Lounge." For additional information, log onto **thedorclubs.com**.



SITTING IN THE DARK

As our thoughts turned to springtime and May, we were reminded of an upcoming holiday—Mother’s Day. Then, how could we help but immediately think of the achingly beautiful track “Mother” on Cindy Morgan’s breathtaking new release, *Postcards* (Reunion). Yes, we knew just the artist to provide our “Personal Perspective” for the month...

It is the middle of the night. It is the middle of my life. And I find that I have more questions now than I ever had answers.

I watch my two girls breathing in their sleep. The easy rise and fall of their tiny frames is hypnotic; with golden hair and fair complexions they could be angels. They are the most wonderful things I have ever seen in my life. My husband is sleeping, oblivious to my worries and wonderings. I go downstairs and sit in the dark to think; and, there in our living room, surrounded by my life, I am struck with a most certain truth: They are growing up.

I think back on my own life. How anxious I was to get away, to move out and discover my own path, unaware of the heartache my parents were going through watching me drive away in my little yellow VW. I remember my dad staying awake nights worrying and wondering if I’d made it home safe from the many trips I took to sing. I never understood why he worried so much. I never understood why my mom always tried to give me advice, much of which was unwelcome, about life and men. I never understood why they wanted me to come home on weekends or stay home instead of going out with friends; but, here in the dark, it occurs to me what they must have felt because I am starting to feel it.

They are growing up.

I have a song on my latest record called “Mother.” It is a very personal song about my own struggle with my mom growing up. It is a song that has taken my lifetime to write and will probably take me another to fully understand. It was written at a time when my mother and I were not speaking. It was a time when I felt very alone, and I remember then, like now, I was sitting up in the dark thinking about my mother. Now I wonder if my mother must have felt the very same way for a long time. Alone. Being a mother does not always win the popular vote because, so often, being a mother is about saying “no” when they are begging for “yes,” saying “I’m disappointed in you” when you’d rather say “let’s go get ice cream.” Being a mother, as I have learned, is a constant battle of balancing love and discipline, fear with exploration, yes with no.

I know now why my mother was always preaching and Bible beating me, why she was always telling me what I “should” do. That was simply because she wanted to protect me. It is so hard to watch your kids be hurt in any way. Our two girls are so bright, brimming over with a great deal of curiosity and independence; and, both like me and my husband, it is in their nature to want to explore, to try new things. It is holding on and letting go. It is falling down and getting up. It is life that we must prepare them for; and, in the end, what both separates and connects us all...is the hand of God.

I think about my sisters who live only a few hours away. But everyone’s life is busy, and we hardly ever see each other. I think of my brothers—same story. I think of my mom, who I talk to very often but would love to see more; and I think of my father, who is with God, and it occurs to me: One day, our two little girls, who spend hours a day talking and playing, who hug and say “I love you” and seem to be lost without each other, will grow up. Our little family of four that is a world within itself for us, a sanctuary that we delight in each day, will one day change. Our girls will go to high school; they will have dates; they will find love and their own lives and move away, maybe to different cities; and then one day, I will be sitting up in the dark like my dad, wondering if they made it home safely. I will look into the faces of their children and feel how it all slips away so quickly. I will say to them “these are the best days of your life” and then go home and cry.

So I’m sitting here in the dark thinking of what I can give them to keep us connected, to bind us together; and, like Dorothy’s red slippers, it has always been



there in my mind but never as clearly as it is at this moment. What I can give them...is God. I want to fill them with the love of God, to read them every Bible story, to fill them with an understanding of what Jesus did and why He did it. I want them to know the promise of a life and a family beyond this life we know, where we can once again be connected and feel safe and loved.

For me, one of the saddest things in my life is that my own father did not live to see my daughters; but what I want to be sure of is that one day they will see him...that we can give to them what our parents gave to us: Hope. When all is lost, love is not lost. When the world changes, God is constant. The love of God stands. We are growing them up for God. They are not ours but God’s...the most precious and wondrous things ever entrusted to us. I want to savor every moment. I want to sit here in the dark and stare into their faces and say, “Thank You, Father. I am blessed beyond measure. Thank You for every throw up, for every skinned knee, for every ‘I love you,’ for every bedtime prayer.” It is the most sacred and wonderful of gifts—to know love as He does, when you are a mother and when you, yourself, are a child of God.

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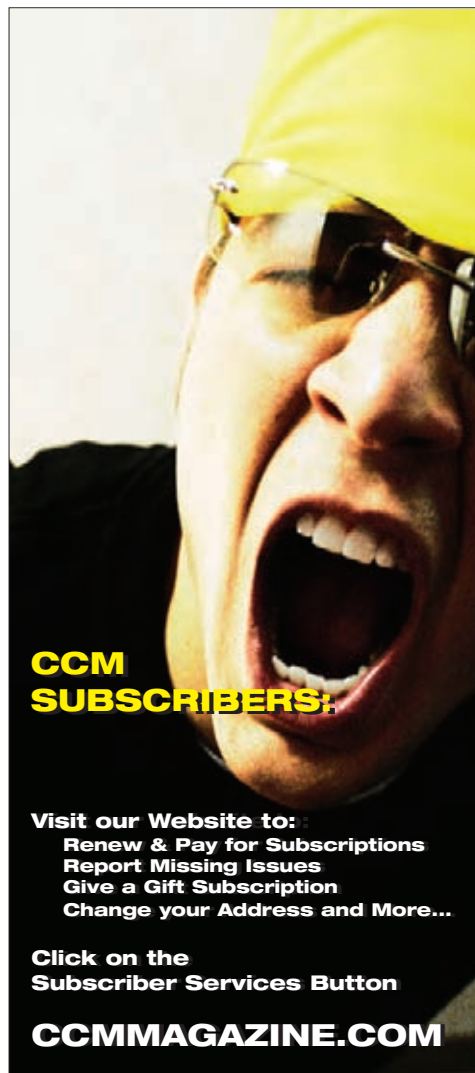
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HISTORYMAKERS WITH JOHN STYLL

MOMENTS THAT SHAPED CCM

THIS MONTH JOHN HIGHLIGHTS THE BIRTH OF CHRISTIAN RADIO'S FIRST CONTEMPORARY MUSIC STATIONS.

[TURN YOUR RADIO ON]



From left: Bill Gaither Trio, Barry McGuire, 2nd Chapter of Acts

Each year the Gospel Music Association (GMA), in cooperation with an organization known as the Christian Music Broadcasters (CMB), announces the "Radio Stations of the Year." (This year's winners were announced on April 3 during GMA Music Week.) It is exciting to know that we have some truly great Christian music stations today that are also getting good ratings and making a difference in their cities. That's a big change from the way things used to be.

One of the reasons *CCM Magazine* originally started was to give Christian radio some information and tools to help them attract larger audiences by improving their programming. While we certainly can't claim as much credit for the excellent state of Christian music radio today, it is very gratifying to know that stations such as KSBJ/Houston, KLTY/Dallas, and WFSH/Atlanta (the three finalists this year in the "major market" category) are doing radio just about as well as it can be done.

If you have grown up with a good Christian music station in your town, you might be surprised to know that little more than 30 years ago, the number of full-time contemporary Christian music radio stations in the United States was zero. Yep, zilch!

It has only been in the past five years or so that Salem Communications (owner of *CCM Magazine*) successfully launched its "Fish" format in major markets. Many other cities have successful commercial Christian music stations as well. And with the proliferation of non-commercial satellite networks such as K-LOVE, Air-1 and WAY-FM (again, just in the past few years), there are now hundreds of stations across the U.S. playing contemporary Christian music as their primary format.

My first Christian music "gig" was a daily, one-hour radio show on an AM station in the Los Angeles area in 1974. On "Hour of Praise," I played a mix of music by everyone from Larry Norman to the Bill Gaither Trio. It was the only hour of music that the station aired. In fact, 3-4 p.m. weekdays were about the only chance you had to hear contemporary Christian music on the radio in L.A. at that time. The show, which was surrounded by preaching and teaching programs, was sometimes a bit controversial because of the music. I remember one day when the station's elderly general manager called me and literally yelled, "What are you doing to my station?" into the phone as "Anyone But Jesus" by Barry McGuire played. (That song would be totally tame by today's standards.) On another occasion, I played "The Devil Is a Liar" by 2nd Chapter of Acts (hard rock in that era); and, I swear, they thought the transmitter was going to melt down!

The first all-music station to come on the air was KBHL in Lincoln, Neb., in March, 1975. KBHL ("Kept By His Love") was programmed by the late Scott Campbell, a true pioneer in Christian music radio who has been memorialized with the "Scott Campbell Award," which is presented annually to a difference-making broadcaster.

Within two weeks of KBHL's debut, KYMS-FM changed to a Christian music format in Orange County, Calif., which, at that time, was an epicenter of Christian music activity. The station switched from a rock format, and for the first several weeks, they used the rock DJs to play the music. It was painfully, and, sometimes, humorously obvious that the announcers didn't know anything about the music they were being forced to play.

For the next few years, stations came, and stations went. This new form of Christian music was still trying to find an audience, and radio programmers were still trying to figure out how to reach them. It was difficult to find enough quality music to fill the airtime without excessive repetition, and it was hard to attract the talent to give the stations a professional sound. Some found more success than others, and by the early '80s, it was a viable format.

Radio is very important to the artists and the music industry. It is still the primary way many people discover songs and artists (although technology is bringing change in that area). For those who have the benefit of a Christian music station in your area, please remember and give thanks to God first but also to the courageous visionaries who paved the way through many obstacles over the last three decades.

Send your thoughts to me at john@gospelmusic.org.

JOHN STYLL is the president of the Gospel Music Association. Before taking its helm, he launched *CCM Magazine* in 1978 and captained our ship for more than 20 years. For more information on the Gospel Music Association or the GMA Music Awards, which it oversees, go to gospelmusic.org.