

CCM'S CRITICS'
PICKS 2006



iFans

WHY **SKILLET** AND
OTHER TECH-SAVVY
ARTISTS ARE CLOSER
TO YOU THAN EVER

THIRD DAY'S CHRISTMAS OFFERING

+ NORMA JEAN • REBECCA ST. JAMES • SWITCHFOOT'S *OH!* GRAVITY.



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How would you describe the music of **NORMA JEAN**? **DR. TONY SHORE** contemplates this question as he explores the huge void this band is filling with its breakout endeavor, *Redeemer*.

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We're living in a technology-infiltrated world these days, and Christian artists are learning new ways to network with their tech-savvy fans. **JOHN J. THOMPSON** explores how a variety of artists are leading the way and how ever-evolving technology is changing and growing their careers, making their music instantly available to the masses.

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Third Day has long been known as a band that listens—and responds—to its fans. **MIKE PARKER** recently connected with the guys to discuss their latest response...*Christmas Offerings*.

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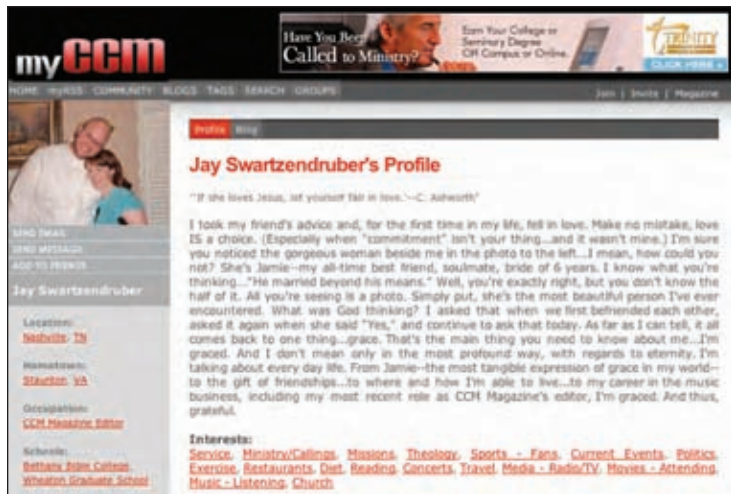
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Whose Space?

Is it possible to be quite uncomfortable with something and still be a fan of it? That's what I ask myself when I think about MySpace and the ways the online phenom personally appeals to me. And make no mistake, there's plenty of appeal. From the chance to engage in a thriving online community to the fact that so much of it is music intensive, the operative word is "fun."

And then there are the opportunities it holds for the church. If you are someone who's especially gifted in the area of evangelism or thrive on being salt and light in culture, MySpace might just be right up your alley. It's both a virtual mission field and a gateway that, among many other things, allows the general public to randomly encounter Christians and better see how we really think and communicate, all from the "safety" of their own homes.

So then, what's this about me being uncomfortable? Well, despite MySpace's efforts this year to clean up some of its notorious act (the often inappropriately provocative photos posted by its members and those occasionally featured in advertisements, etc.), the company merely lowered its standard visual presentation from a would-be "R" rating to—at best—an extremely edgy "PG-13." Or, to put it another way, there's something disconcerting about visiting your favorite modern worship artist's MySpace page and seeing a rotating banner ad for a dating service—complete with degrading photo—running across the top of the page. And by "degrading photo," I mean a picture of a woman dressed in a way that would get her arrested for indecent exposure if she were to walk down a public street in such fashion.

Please know that I'm not voicing these concerns as someone who's been a bastion of sexual purity with regards to my thought-life. While I wish that were true, I want you to know I approach this topic as a man who's been humbled in this area by my own selfishness. That said, I also realize—as one wise friend once prayed—*where there is grace, there is no shame.*

And those MySpace ads? Unfortunately, they go with the territory—literally. MySpace members have no control over which advertisements the company runs on their pages. If you decide to create your own page, that's the trade-off you have to weigh. Is it worth it for the chance to represent Christ in a frequently dark and troubled place? And, if you're an artist, there's also the less noble question: Is it worth it for the exposure you'll receive?

It's going to be interesting to keep an eye on MySpace over the next year or two to see how it changes. It may be enormous today, boasting more than 110 million members, but MySpace mushroomed as a networking site with music as an anchor. And only a couple days before I wrote this column, the company announced some big changes on that front. MySpace is going to start using "audio fingerprinting" technology to block its members from uploading copyrighted music on their personal pages. Furthermore, the company claims members who repeatedly attempt to do so will be permanently banned from MySpace. We'll see how that plays out.

Meanwhile, attentive Christian music fans are discovering our own new online community, **myCCM.org**. We officially launched it on October 1, and, less than a month in, myCCM.org had already welcomed more than 300 artists and 1,200 avid fans as members, with dozens more joining each day. And did I mention that membership is *free*? You can easily create your own personal page, blog and have daily headlines from your favorite websites delivered to you in one location (courtesy of our myCCM-branded RSS reader). In addition to being a place where you can "win friends and influence people" in a redemptive environment, myCCM.org features a plethora of exclusive content, including podcasts, online events (such as performances), giveaways and more. Furthermore, myCCM.org makes it easy to find the music you like, highlighting several subgenres of Christian music. Though still in its infancy, myCCM.org is already the premier site for both signed and independent Christian artists.

Sound like fun? You bet it is.

And if you're interested in sampling the myCCM.org experience, I invite you to visit my own personal page at **myCCM.org/Jay**. You'll be glad you did. (This is where my friend Chris Well would say, "To quote Han Solo to Luke Skywalker in the original *Star Wars*: 'Great kid, don't get cocky!'")

Jay@CCMmagazine.com

CCM MAGAZINE

Your Christian Music Magazine Since 1978
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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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Publisher Jim Cumbee
Associate Publisher Rick Edwards
Editor Jay Swartzendruber
Media & Web Editor Kristi Henson
Assistant Editor Lindsay Williams
Art Director Mary Sergent

Contributing Editors Andy Argyrakis, Margaret Becker, Paul Colman, Russ Long, Kate McDonald, Nichole Nordeman, Gregory Rumburg, John Styll, Chris Well, Matthew West

Contributors Christa A. Banister, Anthony Barr-Jeffrey, Beau Black, Jackie A. Chapman, Andree Farias, Melissa Hambrick, Brian Quincy Newcomb, Mike Parker, Deborah Evans Price, Andrew Scates, Dr. Tony Shore, Michael W. Smith, John J. Thompson

Production Director Ross E. Cluver

Circulation Director Joan Dyer

Circulation Manager Jamie Kunzmann

Fulfillment Manager Leesa Smith

Customer Service Representatives Amy Cassell, Rachel Harrold, Emeka Nnadi

Executive Director of Advertising Jerry Charles 615/312-4244

Senior Director of Advertising DeDe Tarrant 805/987-5072

Account Executive Brian Lawing 615/312-4260

Account Executive Pat McAbee 770/237-5400

Account Executive Gary Miller 970/203-0417

Advertising Traffic Manager Carol Jones

Administrative Sales Assistant Melissa Smart

Main Office 104 Woodmont Blvd., Suite 300, Nashville, TN 37205
 615/386-3011 (ph) • 615/386-3380 (business fax)
 615/385-4112 (editorial fax) • 615/312-4266 (advertising fax)

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WOWZERS

Over the last couple of years, I have seen the quality of your magazine drastically improve, and it has been exciting to see the quality of work that you are developing for all of us. CCM is enjoyable for us to read and beneficial to the Christian music community that has so much to offer to the world at large. The primary reason I wanted to write you is to overwhelmingly thank you for creating *WOW: The Magazine* and including it with your October issue. I want to strongly encourage you to continue this tradition in the years ahead. Your work was incredible and hugely impactful in the way that it introduced subscribers to all of the featured bands, allowed us to connect with them on a greater level and get a glimpse of their heart and motivation behind the songs they produce. Consider this an “A+++” on the tremendous work you did. In addition, I want to thank all of the artists who, though human, are striving to live a life that glorifies God. I am so proud of all of them. Keep up the great work.

Brance Barker
Arlington, TX

We're glad you liked it, Brance. We'd like to thank the WOW committee for sponsoring the special "advertorial" magazine and making it possible in the first place.

CAN I GET AN “AMEN”?

I especially appreciated Jay's self-effacing review of the book *Body Piercing Saved My Life* ["From the Editor," October]. Good goin' for having the guts to actually review an allegedly “secular” treatment of the

music formerly known as “ccm.” My church, Mars Hill, actually offers this title in our book nook. John Styll's look back at Amy's critics was a breath of fresh air, too ["HistoryMakers"]. I'm actually old enough to remember that flap (and I still see the sweetly smiling teen she was—seems a lifetime ago now). But I stopped being a big fan of “ccm” sometime between the first “C” (for contemporary) getting dropped and the latest Christian pop-music phenom, “modern worship.” Maybe I'm a little too cynical, but it just seems that “worship” that is all about me is not worship at all and should really be known by some other name—“praise-pop,” perhaps. Worship, for the believer, is still expressed in all that we do (excepting the sin, of course); not just the musical portion of our corporate gatherings. Amen!?

Steve Rush Garrett
Seattle, WA

KRYSTAL CLEAR

I have been subscribing to CCM for almost five years and, until now, I had never been disappointed. I loved this October issue because I saw Skillet, and I love Skillet to death. They saved my life—literally they led me to Christ. I was very happy until I read the CD review for Krystal Meyers' *Dying for a Heart* ["InReview Music"]. First of all, there is no way she sounds like Hilary Duff. Hilary Duff sounds fake. Krystal Meyers doesn't. She's real. She is comfortable in her own skin and stands up for what she believes in. Do you see Avril or Hilary or Ashlee Simpson doing that? No, you don't. Krystal Meyers stands out. Take the song “The Situation,” for example.



Yeah, it talks about high school drama. The point? She's singing to the high school crowd. Duh! Are you stupid? I'm sorry, but this ticked me off. She is singing about something that not a lot of people are confident enough to sing about. She's singing about premarital sex—that sex is worth the wait. It's better waiting than giving in. High school students go through that pressure, and if you don't know that, wow, I'm sorry, but you need to get out in the real world more often. I think you gave this record a grade [C-] it does not deserve. It deserves an “A.” Everyone I have talked to agrees with me on this one. I'm sorry, but that was a poor review—very poor. Thank you for your time.

Kara Johnson
Romulus, MI

THE ZACK FILES

I discovered CCM this past July and immediately sent in for a subscription. I really dove into the Christian music

scene about two years ago, and I was so thankful to find a magazine that reported on all that is Christian music. CCM introduced me to bands that I really enjoy (Hyper Static Union, downhere, Leeland) and gives me updates on my quintessential favorites (Third Day, Mark Schultz, Matthew West, Big Daddy Weave). I look forward to reports on emerging bands and more info on my favorites in the future!

I really appreciate the brief explanations behind songs, band names, album names and more. I'm big on the “stories behind the scenes” type of thing, so I love reading those in CCM. I enjoy your wide coverage of different types of Christian music. I like reading the “Feedback” section, Matthew West's “Writer's Block” column (Matthew, my girlfriend, Maggie, loves your music!), Nichole Nordeman's “Loose Ends” column (My mom, Amy, loves your music!), and I find the “InReview” section especially helpful. Thank you so much for doing what you're doing!

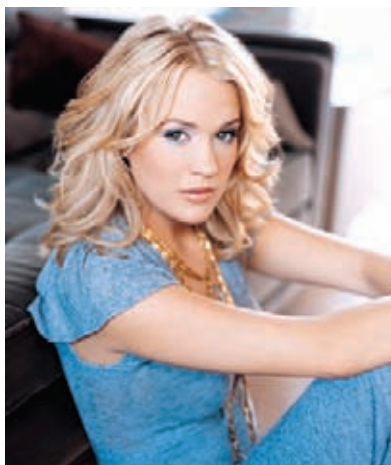
Zack Brewer
Prairie du Rocher, IL

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Email: feedback@CCMmagazine.com or
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Always include your full name, address
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insider

Kathy Troccoli's love story,
introducing Jonezetta and more



For God and Country

Even since the pioneering days of the legendary CARTER FAMILY—known as the “first family of country music”—devoutly Christian recording artists have helped shape the country music landscape. But now, more than ever, faith is at the forefront of this influential music scene.

From left (top): Carrie Underwood, Brad Paisley, The Oak Ridge Boys, Alan Jackson; (bottom): The Charlie Daniels Band, Brooks & Dunn

There has always been a strong connection between Christian music and country music. Many country recording artists are believers, and, throughout the years, it's not been uncommon for these singers to record sacred or spiritual music as part of their repertoire.

Recently, though, there's been an unprecedented boom in high profile artists recording songs with faith-based messages. **Brooks & Dunn** had a hit with the poignant ballad “Believe.” **Carrie Underwood**'s “Jesus, Take the Wheel” spent six weeks at No. 1. **Brad Paisley**, who always records a Christian song on every album, scored a hit with “When I Get Where I'm Going,” featuring **Dolly Parton**. “Most country music comes from the church and blues,” says Brooks & Dunn's Ronnie Dunn. “I'm betting that the majority of country singers and writers were first exposed to music in church.”

Duane Allen of The Oak Ridge Boys agrees. “Many country entertainers were brought up in church,” he says. “We were taught from early childhood that God is our helper in time of need, our protector when we feel unsafe, our doctor when we are sick, our comfort when we are troubled. It is only natural that we want to sing about God.”

Dunn credits Nashville's songwriters with creating music that moves people. “There are a couple of prominent songwriters who are surfing spiritual waves. **Craig Wiseman** is one of those guys,” he says. (Wiseman co-wrote “Believe” with Dunn and co-wrote the **Tim McGraw** hit “Live Like You Were Dying” with **Tim Nichols**.) “Craig's wife is a recently ordained minister, and Craig is a born again Christian and tremendously successful and gifted songwriter.”

Many country artists are recording full-length Christian albums. **Alan Jackson** recorded a collection of gospel songs as a Christmas gift for his mother. When the record company released it commercially, *Precious Memories* (ACR/Arista

Nashville) quickly sold more than a million copies in a few months. “A lot of my fans grew up in the South, and I thought they'd want to hear it. So I figured we'd sell a few, but I never thought it would do something like this,” says Jackson, a Georgia native who grew up singing hymns in church.

Award-winning group **Alabama** just released its first Christian album, *Songs of Inspiration* (RCA). “I wanted to record songs that really touch your heart,” Alabama's **Randy Owen** says of the collection.

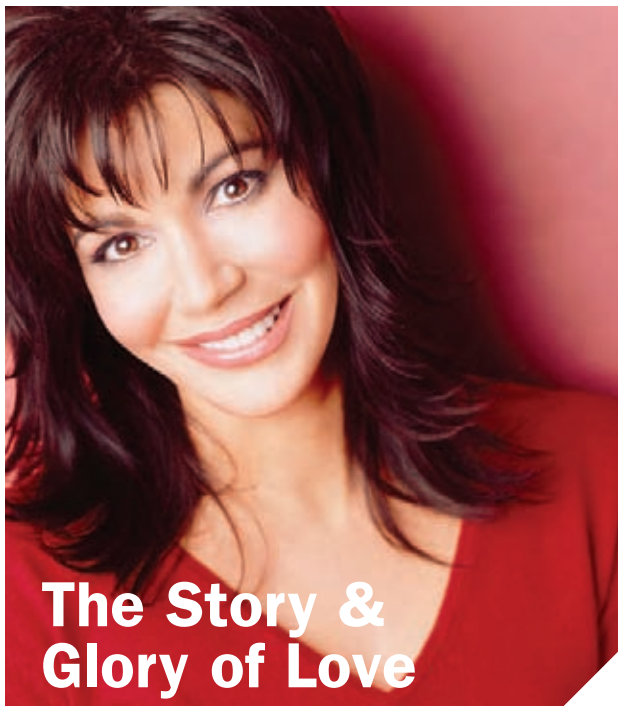
Country veterans **Bill Anderson** and **John Conlee** have also recorded Christian albums. There are also two new Christian compilation CDs that feature country artists. Arista's *Believe—Songs of Faith From Today's Top Country & Christian Artists* features Brooks & Dunn, **Kenny Chesney**, **Sara Evans** and **Phil Vassar**. Word Records issued *Three Wooden Crosses* which includes Tim McGraw, **Rascal Flatts**, **John Michael Montgomery**, **Steve Wariner**, **Lee Ann Womack** and **Randy Travis**, who contributes the title track—the Country Music Association's 2003 “Song of the Year.”

Charlie Daniels has recorded four Christian albums—1994's *The Door*, 1996's *Steel Witness*, 2001's *How Sweet the Sound* for Sparrow Records and last year's bluegrass gospel collection, *Songs of the Longleaf Pines*.

“There's so much comfort and reassurance in Christian music that we don't find in other music,” Daniels says. “If you want to listen to something that means something, that's comforting and telling the truth, it's Christian music.”

He cites “Jesus, Take the Wheel” as an example. “There are some great songs that appeal to young people. With ‘Jesus, Take the Wheel,’ you couldn't speak to them in a plainer way. [It's like saying,] ‘Lord, take a hold of the situation, get a hold of my life. I need You.’ And that's a great way to put it.”

DEBORAH EVANS PRICE



The Story & Glory of Love

After almost 25 years, 18 studio albums, multiple Dove Awards and GRAMMY® nods, vocalist, speaker and author **KATHY TROCCOLI** is as personal as ever. One listen to *The Story of Love* (KT), and you'll agree that she has, once again, found her voice.

Kathy Troccoli does her own thing now. Free of many of the constraints of music industry newcomers, there's something to be said for being a veteran. An in-demand speaker for women's conferences all over the U.S., Troccoli is able to speak from the heart in her own way. "Well, it's like what I tell women right now—that God is not done writing our stories. He continues to write our stories every

“There is something in the mystery of God that uses our suffering to bring healing.”

day if we just keep the pen in His hand. And, I have learned so much," she reflects. "You know, I couldn't do what I am doing now in my 20s, even somewhat in my 30s. I couldn't offer some of the hope that I am offering from stage. My story wasn't where it is now."

Her story? In a nutshell, the story of love. The befittingly-titled new album runs the gamut musically from jazzy, torch-song classics to hard-hitting ballads and even a cover of Keith Green's "Make My Life a Prayer to You." And Troccoli co-wrote several songs on the project, allowing for even more personal expression. "There is something in the mystery of God that uses our suffering to bring healing. I think that is pretty much what is happening in my life right now. It is a glorious time. I mean, I am so glad that He lets it unfold in His timing, because, if somebody had told me back in the early '80s, 'You are going to have to wait until you are in your 40s to really feel like you've found your sweet spot,' I'd be going 'Ahhh.'" But the story of love always unfolds in perfect time.

Get additional info at kathytroccoli.com. **KRISTI HENSON**

FANFARE



FRESH LOVE

Chris M.C. from Beatmart hip-hop duo **Fresh Digress** is getting married this month to his lovely fiancée from Sweden. Chris' soul mate, Sarah Wickstrom, has been involved in various forms of hip-hop herself, and, although she is currently attending school to become a medical assistant, chances are good that she will join her husband as a part of the Fresh Digress touring team in the future. Chris and Sarah will marry December 16. Fresh off the "Radio Static Tour," Chris & Co. will head back into the studio in 2007 to record their sophomore album. Check out freshdigress.com for up-to-date info.



JUST IN TIME FOR THE HOLIDAYS...

Rob Beckley, front man for **Pillar**, and his wife, Linda, recently celebrated the birth of their first child, **Hudson Cash Beckley**. Hudson was born the morning of October 8. This little bundle weighed in at 8 lbs. and 14 oz. Beckley and his band are currently out on tour in support of

their new release, *The Reckoning* (Flicker). Log on to pillarmusic.com for tour dates.

The Swift's Mike Simons and his wife, Suzanne, welcomed their



first child, a daughter, on September 22. **Nola Michael** weighed in at 7 lbs., 7 oz. and was 19 inches long. In the meantime, Nola's dad—bassist and vocalist for the group—will be touring in support of The Swift's new album, *Singing Back to You* (Rocketown). See the-swift.com for more info.

New Essential Records modern rock band Red added a little one



to its line-up. Bassist **Randy Armstrong**, along with his wife, Bethany, welcomed a baby boy September 15. **Asher Lee Armstrong** made his debut in Franklin, Tenn., at 5:50 a.m., weighing in at 5 lbs. and 5 oz. And, speaking of debuts, Red's album, *End of Silence*, is in stores now. Check out redmusiconline.com for details.

LINDSAY WILLIAMS

I WANT MYCCM (.ORG)

Looking for interviews with content to rival even that of NPR? Check out this month's **exclusive Christmas-themed podcasts** at myCCM.org:

- December 4**—**Todd Agnew** asks *Do You See What I See?*
- December 11**—**Mary Mary** is having a very Mary Christmas this year.
- December 18**—**Leigh Nash** tells us why she's *Wishing for This* this Christmas.
- December 25**—**Moya Brennan** is having an Irish Christmas...and you can, too!



MXPX REUNITES WITH TOOTH & NAIL

Punk fave **MXPX** has reconnected with its original label, Tooth & Nail Records, for the deluxe reissue of the band's best-selling album, *Let It Happen*. "Just when I think making music is easy, it gets easier," MXPX vocalist/bassist **Mike Herrera** tells CCM. "I'm talking about recording the three new songs for the *Let It Happen* rerelease. Tooth & Nail has been great to work with in every aspect of the process. We booked time with [producer] **Aaron Sprinkle** in their Seattle studio and pulled it out in four days.

"Role Remodeling" is the first single and a definite favorite out of the three," he continues. "Once we recorded the songs, the rest was even easier." He adds, "Tooth & Nail had tons of great ideas for this project, including the DVD, which features every one of our music videos to date."



AARON SHUST

Aaron Shust wishes you a Merry Christmas (and, of course, a Happy New Year)! In the spirit of the season and to thank supporters for such a wonderful year, he's recorded a Christmas song, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel," just for you! Find details on the FREE download at aaronshust.com.



Head of the Class

Thanks to its debut release, *Popularity*, and an opening tour slot with MuteMath, **JONEZETTA** is well on its way.

Note to anyone interested in dating one of the guys in new Tooth & Nail band Jonezetta: You may get four boyfriends for the price of one.

"See, we've got a van right now on the road, and it's a nice place," says front man Robert Chisolm. "But it also gets really stressful, too. Basically, if you're dating someone, she practically dates everyone in the band. There's not much space, so she has to have conversations with everyone all the time."

Hmmm. Now, for some girls, that scenario wouldn't be all

bad. Despite the cramped quarters, however, Chisolm certainly isn't complaining. "We've been having a great time on the road with MuteMath," he says. "It's been fun to play our songs for people and see their positive response."

For anyone who hasn't heard the Mississippi natives' music yet, it's easy to hear why it would translate well in a live setting as it has the frenetic energy of bands such as Franz Ferdinand, The Killers and The Faint.

"With our album, we wanted to take an element of what's already being done with those bands and put our own twist on it," Chisolm adds. And, with quirky but clever songs like "Get Ready (Hot Machete)," "Burn It Down!" and "The City We Live In," it sounds like Jonezetta has accomplished just that.

Find out more at jonezetta.com.

CHRISTA A. BANISTER

The Luck of the Irish

The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines a haunting melody as "one that is continually recurring to the mind; unforgettable." The editors should go one step further and refer people to **MOYA BRENNAN**. Moya's music is haunting—unforgettable. And *An Irish Christmas* (Sparrow/EMI) is no exception to this rule.

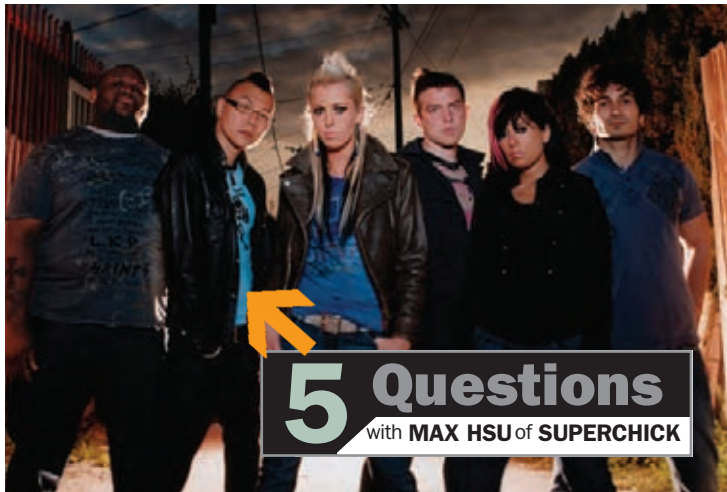
With *An Irish Christmas*, Moya Brennan, the voice of Clannad, who is sometimes called the first lady of Celtic music, has produced a rare gem of a Christmas record featuring her indelible imprint. "I would like to think that I have given these songs the 'Moya treatment' but still retained the beauty of the song, if you know what I mean," she says via phone from her home near Dublin, Ireland. "I suppose doing something like this, it was important for me to do it with my sound and everything. I was looking around at all that is out there at Christmas—and a lot of people do Christmas albums," she muses. "There are always the choirs and orchestras, which is brilliant. [I was] even listening to some Celtic Christmas music—to me, when you use the word 'Celtic,' I thought it would be a bit more *Celtic*."

So Moya gathered songs, put her authentic trademark Celtic spin on them and *An Irish Christmas* was born. "It was great to do with this kind of flavor," she explains and cites an example. "'God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen,' when you hear it first—the intro—you haven't a clue which song it is. In that way, it is interesting for me; but I don't change any of the lyrics or any of the melodies. It was such fun to do!" And with its timeless feel, it's sure to become a Celtic Christmas classic.

For more info, visit moyabrennan.com.

KRISTI HENSON





5 Questions with MAX HSU of SUPERCHICK

SUPERCHICK's MAX HSU (keyboards/DJ) and his bandmates are currently wrapping up their hugely successful "Live Love Tour" (details at superchick.net). The Chick's super sonics have been heard in more than 60 different films and TV shows, including *Legally Blonde* (and *LB II*), MTV's "Real World/Road Rules Challenge: The Gauntlet 2," NBC's promo spots for the 2006 Winter Olympics, "The Practice" and "Alias." Recently, the band released *Beauty From Pain 1.1* (Columbia/Inpop), a revamped version of its 2005 project. So, it's obvious that Superchick's pretty fab...but does Max have super answers for the "5 Questions"?

1. What five words best describe you?

Ridiculous. Silly. Broken. Incomplete. Honest.

2. What's your most embarrassing moment?

We recorded a 7,000-person crowd in Tulsa singing along on our first album, and I couldn't wait to get back to Tulsa. On our next tour, when we were opening for newsboys, I would go to the merch booth before each show and talk to kids. At one show, some girls came up and said, "We sang on your album; we were at that show!" And I was so excited to be back in Tulsa. I strutted onto stage with a loud, "What's up TULSA!!!!" Normally, there'd be a huge roar. That night, 5,000 people just stared at me. After a bit of silence, I heard muttering grow and then these angry words: "You're in WICHITA."

Get all the details on this embarrassing story online at myCCM.org this month.

3. What's a song you wish you had written?

There are way too many. I like everybody's stuff better than mine.

4. What's one question you've never been asked (and the answer)?

"What is it like to pour your heart and soul into a record and then read the critical reviews?" It's hard. It's really, really hard. College newspapers are the hardest, I think. One young reviewer said: "The only reason I can think of for this record [*Beauty From Pain*] is that Inpop had an excess of blank CDs." I know you volunteer for it when you're a public figure, but it hurts anyway. In the end, though, there's no worse critic than the one I have in my head.

5. What's the best spiritual advice you've ever been given?

That God loves us in our brokenness. Whether we run from Him, don't believe in Him, hate Him or ignore Him, He's still relentless in how He loves us. Read Hosea for details.

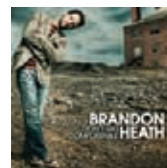
THIS MONTH @ CCMAGAZINE.COM



Here at CCM, we like to pack a proverbial (and virtual) punch! To that end, we bring you things of beauty, things of light, things with royal beauty bright (Yes, it's a Christmas carol...we also believe in being festive.). Here's a bit of what you can find online in December...

>> We recently wrapped up our **Krystal Meyers giveaway**, and, although we wanted to announce all the winners in this issue, there were simply too many names and too little room in this column! (Of course, that's a good thing. It means we had *lots* of winners.) So, **we've posted all the winners online at CCMmagazine.com**. And we'll also be listing the names of the winners (at least 10 of you for each contest) for all our current promotions online very soon after the **giveaways end on December 5**, so check out CCMmagazine.com now and enter to win!

>> At press time, several promotions are still running (thru December 5). **Register to win a Third Day prize pack** featuring autographed **Christmas Offerings** (Essential) CDs and sweatshirts from the "Wherever You Are Tour." Also, put your name in the hat for a **Brandon Heath prize pack**, complete with limited-edition autographed pre-release copies of his critically acclaimed debut, *Don't Get Comfortable* (Reunion), a T-shirt and a **Brandon Heath Bar** (For real! That was too good to make up!).



Then, be sure to **enter to win a pair of tickets** (good at theaters nationwide) to see **The Nativity Story** (New Line Cinema), which opens in theaters December 1. Winners will also receive copies of **The Nativity Story: Original Score** (Word) and **The Nativity Story: Sacred Songs** (Word), featuring music from **Amy Grant, Mark Schultz, Natalie Grant, BarlowGirl** and more! Want to find out more about *The Nativity Story*? Check out our **exclusive online-only feature interview with Catherine Hardwicke**, the director of the film. With a fabulous Hollywood resumé and an eagerly anticipated new movie, she chats with CCM about telling the story, making the film and making a difference. This is one interesting Q&A session you won't want to miss!

>> In an **online only "Listening In"** segment, we've matched up **Michael Jr.**, one of the stars of the hilarious Christian comedy special *Thou Shalt Laugh* (Warner Bros. DVD), with the ladies of R&B/gospel trio **Trin-i-tee 5:7**. Log on, listen in to the conversation as Angel, Adrian & Chanelle interview this comedian, and laugh along as Michael Jr. works in a few comic moments!

>> In celebration of the forthcoming New Year, **we're giving away grab bags of some of the biggest hits of 2006!** Stop by CCMmagazine.com no later than **January 2** (yeah, we know you may be a bit tired on New Year's Day, so we're cutting you some slack) and enter to win. Titles include CDs from **Relient K, GRITS, Hyper Static Union, DecembeRadio, Day of Fire** and more. And, again, we've got enough in this stash to spread the love around...so sign up now.



DECEMBER

“Winter Wonder Slam Tour”

—Fort Wayne, Ind.

For his annual Christmas tour this year, **tobyMac** is decking the halls in style like only he can. Joining him for this year’s holiday bash will be some of Christian music’s hottest acts including **Hawk Nelson**, **The Afters**, and newcomers **Family Force 5** and **Ayiesha Woods**. Attendees are encouraged to bring gifts for needy children as part of a Toys for Tots drive that will extend through all 16 dates. Check out winterwonderslam.com for details and tour dates.

1



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“Christmastime Tour”

—Atlanta, Ga.

This past fall, **Michael W. Smith** took to performing acoustic sets at smaller, more intimate venues. However, throughout this Christmas season, he can be found in sold-out arenas and auditoriums across the country on his annual “Christmastime Tour.” Orchestras will be accompanying Smith on all of the dates this time around. Prepare for an exquisite evening and log on to michaelwsmith.com for details.

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“The Christmas to Believe in Tour”

—Springfield, Mo.



Celebrating the gift of the first Christmas at churches across the country, GMA “Female Vocalist of the Year” **Natalie Grant** will make one last tour run before her twins arrive. Grant will be singing songs from her critically acclaimed holiday release, *Believe* (Curb), and will be joined by **Anthony Evans** as well as local church choirs in each city. Visit Natalie’s website, nataliegrant.com, for info.



17

“Punk The Halls Tour”

—Bowling Green, Ky.

For all of you asking for punk music for Christmas, this tour is for you. Join **Stellar Kart**, **RunKidRun** and **Eleventyseven** as they celebrate the season in upbeat fashion. These three pop-punk acts are banning together for a tour full of fun and high-energy tunes. Log on to stellarkart.com to learn more.



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Christmas Day

Birthdays

- 1—Max Hsu (*Superchick*), Mat Kearney, Christian Perreira (*Olivia the Band*)
- 2—Isaac Jorgensen (*Foolish Things*)
- 3—Jordan Yates (*PureNRG*)
- 6—Michael Anderson (*Building 429*)

- 9—Steve Taylor [and his clone]
- 12—Greg Long (*Avalon*)
- 15—Kristin Swinford (*ZOEgirl*)
- 16—Todd Bragg (*Caedmon’s Call*), Reality (*Fresh Digress*)
- 17—Jeff Jones (*Big Daddy Weave*)
- 18—Jesse Garcia (*Building 429*), Ryan Riggins (*Pocket Full of Rocks*)

- 23—Mandee Radford (*Alathea*)
- 25—Mac Powell (*Third Day*)
- 27—Matt Fuqua (*The Afters*), Shaun Groves
- 28—Twila Paris
- 30—Kim Hill



★ Welcome to the world of independent artists.

Caitlyn Smith

Silence



At the age of 19, this singer/songwriter from Minneapolis, Minn., already has two full-length records to her name and is preparing for a summer release of her third. Playing both piano and guitar before she was even a teenager, Caitlyn's unique voice effortlessly finds its place in the folksy rhythms and melodies she composes. Get more info on Caitlyn at caitlynsmith.com.



Poor Rich Folk

No More Than a Window



This band out of Fort Worth, Texas, compares its sound to "early Caedmon's Call and Shane & Shane." Great guitar-driven folk music is the backdrop for this four-piece's heartfelt lyrics and harmonies. Its 2005 release, *No More Than a Window*, is a fine musical investment. Hear more at poorrichfolk.com.



Theatrimus

Slow Motion



Best described as "theatrical instrumental music," the wildly creative CD *Slow Motion* will enchant you! With haunting sounds and complex arrangements, you are unlikely to hear something like this elsewhere. If you are a music lover who appreciates mood and ambiance or a lover of soundtracks, don't hesitate to pick this one up. Visit theatrimus.com for more info.



Bill Mallonee

Yonder Shines the Infant Light



Billed as a "Christmas EP," this disc actually contains seven Bill Mallonee tracks, plus five "bonus" Christmas songs that had been recorded by his former band, Vigilantes of Love. *Yonder Shines the Infant Light* is an eclectic Americana recording, complete with lush instrumentation, folk ballads and Mallonee's gut-rock conviction. Find out more at fundamentalrecords.com/yonder.htm.



Profiles by KATE McDONALD and JAY SWARTZENDRUBER

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 email: indies@CCMmagazine.com.



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

By: Margaret Becker

Out on the road, so many of you have asked me the same questions over the past several years. There's never enough time to truly address them, so I thought I'd use this month's column and podcast to relay some basic answers. OK, Indies. Here goes!

When do I know it's time to make a record?

That question is probably the wrong question. You should be asking if a record will help you achieve your goals. Ask yourself if a record is necessary and helpful in your present situation as an artist. For example, if you're playing one gig a month, drawing an average of 20 people, and you're not promoting yourself on the Internet, more than likely, a record is not necessary. On the other hand, you may never want to do a live gig or make a living at music, but, rather, just make interesting music and allow others to experience it. Maybe then a record makes sense. There are so many ways to look at it. Whatever the case, just make sure that making a record will help you reach your desired end.

How much should I spend on a record?

The good news is that home studios have come a long way with the advent of programs like Pro Tools, Nuendo and others. Some of my best recording moments have been in someone's attic with a baseline Pro Tools LE rig. Instead of giving you a specific dollar amount to spend, my advice is this: Only spend what you think you can reasonably get out of the project (Money-wise, can you make the budget back?).

Do I need a producer?

A producer is like a creative contractor. They should bring a "finish" to your music. Their touch should dress up what's inherently there without distracting from what is indigenous to you. A good producer will refine, support and help you emphasize the great parts of your work while deemphasizing the weaker points.

How do I get my record into the hands of listeners?

The Internet has changed this process for the better. There are countless organizations/sites where you can list your songs and have people download your music and pay for it. Some examples are indieheaven.com, burnlounge.com, cdbaby.com or even [iTunes.com](http://itunes.com).

How do I get my album in the hands of a record company?

For the answer to this, and more on the subject, download the podcast (info below).



This month's podcast is online at maggieb.com. Also, be sure to check out Margaret's book, *Coming Up for Air* (Navpress), available at amazon.com and christianbook.com.



[TOP CHRISTIAN/GOSPEL ALBUMS OVERALL]

**THE TOP-SELLING
CHRISTIAN ALBUMS
ACCORDING TO
NIELSEN SOUNDSCAN**



[Highest Debut:.....AVALON]

Faith: A Hymns Collection (Sparrow)

THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	WEEKS ON CHIT	ARTIST	TITLE (Label)
★1	1	3	VARIOUS	WOW HITS 2007 (Sparrow/EMI)
2	3	4	CHRIS TOMLIN	<i>See the Morning</i> (sixsteps)
3	2	3	FRED HAMMOND	<i>Free to Worship</i> (Verity)
4	4	34	ALAN JACKSON	<i>Precious Memories</i> (ACR/Arista Nashville)
5	5	70	JEREMY CAMP	<i>Restored</i> (BEC)
6	7	8	VARIOUS	<i>Three Wooden Crosses</i> (Word)
7	8	3	SMOKIE NORFUL	<i>Life Changing</i> (EMI CMG)
8	10	5	JONNY LANG	<i>Turn Around</i> (A&M/Provident-Integrity)
9	11	54	FLYLEAF	<i>Flyleaf</i> (Octone/S-R-E)
10	9	3	SKILLET	<i>Comatose</i> (Ardent/S-R-E/Lava/Atlantic)
11	6	2	KENNY LATTIMORE/CHANTÉ MOORE	<i>Uncovered</i> (La Face)
12	14	60	CASTING CROWNS	<i>Lifesong</i> (Beach Street)
13	15	4	MARK SCHULTZ	<i>Broken & Beautiful</i> (Word)
14	13	3	PILLAR	<i>The Reckoning</i> (Flicker)
15	12	2	DEITRICK HADDON	<i>7 Days</i> (Verity)
16	16	27	MAT KEARNEY	<i>Nothing Left to Lose</i> (Inpop/Columbia)
17	17	2	THIRD DAY	<i>Christmas Offerings</i> (Essential)
18	18	7	JARS OF CLAY	<i>Good Monsters</i> (Essential)
19	21	55	KIRK FRANKLIN	<i>Hero</i> (Gospocentric)
20	20	51	THIRD DAY	<i>Wherever You Are</i> (Essential)
21	30	66	MARY MARY	<i>Mary Mary</i> (Columbia/Integrity)
22	23	4	AMY GRANT	<i>Time Again...Amy Grant Live</i> (Word)
23	22	2	MICAH STAMPLEY	<i>Fresh Wind</i> (Levitical)
24	34	70	CHRIS TOMLIN	<i>Arriving</i> (sixsteps)
25	32	11	SELAH	<i>Bless the Broken Road: The Duets</i> (Curb)
26	29	3	CASTING CROWNS	<i>Lifesong Live</i> (Beach Street)
27	31	22	TYE TRIBBETT	<i>Victory Live!</i> (Sony Urban/Columbia/Integrity)
28	26	4	JUANITA BYNUM/JONATHAN BUTLER	<i>Gospel Grows Classical</i> (Maranatha)
29	24	4	DAVE HOLLISTER	<i>Book of David: The Transition</i> (Gospocentric)
30	25	18	UNDEROATH	<i>Define the Great Line</i> (Tooth & Nail)
31	28	11	VICKIE WINANS	<i>Woman to Woman: Songs of Life</i> (Verity)
32	27	26	MERCYME	<i>Coming Up to Breathe</i> (INO)
33	—	1	AVALON	<i>Faith: A Hymns Collection</i> (Sparrow)
34	37	29	VARIOUS	<i>WOW Worship: Aqua</i> (Provident)
35	—	1	BILL & GLORIA GAITHER	<i>Church in the Wildwood</i> (Springhouse)
36	45	70	MERCYME	<i>Almost There</i> (INO)
37	40	70	CASTING CROWNS	<i>Casting Crowns</i> (Beach Street)
38	35	6	NORMA JEAN	<i>Redeemer</i> (Solid State)
39	41	41	JUANITA BYNUM	<i>Piece of My Passion</i> (Flow)
40	—	1	BILL & GLORIA GAITHER	<i>Hymns</i> (Springhouse)

*Each chart reflects Christian and general market combined album sales for the week ending **October 22, 2006**. All charts © 2006 by Nielsen SoundScan (a division of VNU Marketing Information) and Christian Music Trade Association. All rights reserved. No reproduction without permission.

>>HitLists cont. on Page 18

>>cont. from Page 16

[TOP ROCK/ALTERNATIVE ALBUMS]

THIS WEEK	WEEKS ON CHIT	ARTIST	TITLE (Label)
★ 1	5	 JONNY LANG	Turn Around (A&M/Provident-Integrity)
2	54	FLYLEAF	<i>Flyleaf</i> (Octone/S-R-E)
3	3	SKILLET	<i>Comatose</i> (Ardent/S-R-E/Lava/Atalantic)
4	4	PILLAR	<i>The Reckoning</i> (Flicker)
5	51	THIRD DAY	<i>Wherever You Are</i> (Essential)
6	18	UNDEROATH	<i>Define the Great Line</i> (Tooth & Nail)
7	6	NORMA JEAN	<i>Redeemer</i> (Solid State)
8	56	BARLOWGIRL	<i>Another Journal Entry</i> (Fervent)
9	12	AUDIO ADRENALINE	<i>Adios: The Greatest Hits</i> (Forefront/EMI)
10	29	HAWK NELSON	<i>Smile, It's the End of the World</i> (Tooth & Nail)
11	31	KUTLESS	<i>Hearts of the Innocent</i> (BEC)
12	86	KUTLESS	<i>Strong Tower</i> (BEC)
13	4	MEWITHOUTYOU	<i>Brother, Sister</i> (Tooth & Nail)
14	10	LEELAND	<i>Sound of Melodies</i> (Essential)
15	20	RED	<i>End of Silence</i> (Essential)
16	13	STELLAR KART	<i>We Can't Stand Sitting Down</i> (Word)
17	3	VARIOUS	<i>X 2007</i> (Sparrow)
18	29	SANCTUS REAL	<i>The Face of Love</i> (Sparrow)
19	5	KRYSTAL MEYERS	<i>Dying for a Heart</i> (Essential)
20	103	RELIENT K	<i>MMHMM</i> (Gotee/Capitol)

[TOP R&B/HIP-HOP ALBUMS]

THIS WEEK	WEEKS ON CHIT	ARTIST	TITLE (Label)
★ 1	2	 KENNY LATTIMORE/ CHANTÉ MOORE	Uncovered (La Face)
2	3	GLADYS KNIGHT & SAINTS UNIFIED	<i>Christmas Celebration</i> (SMOU)
3	3	VARIOUS	<i>Body + Soul Gospel</i> (TMLF)
4	11	LECRAE	<i>After the Music Stops</i> (Cross Movement)
5	70	TOBYMAC	<i>Welcome to Diverse City</i> (Forefront/EMI)
6	59	CECE WINANS	<i>Purified</i> (Pure Springs Gospel/INO)
7	70	KJ-52	<i>Behind the Musik</i> (BEC)
8	10	VARIOUS	<i>Hip Hope Hits 2007</i> (Gotee)
9	14	21:03	<i>Twenty One O Three</i> (Verity)
10	30	GRITS	<i>7</i> (Gotee)
11	1	VARIOUS	<i>Holy Hip-Hop, Vol. 4</i> (EMI CMG)
12	25	KJ-52	<i>KJ-52 Remixed</i> (BEC)
13	70	RUBEN STUDDARD	<i>I Need an Angel</i> (Provident)
14	10	THE CROSS MOVEMENT	<i>Chronicles Greatest Hits, Vol. 1</i> (Cross Movement)
15	8	NIYOKI	<i>My Everything</i> (D2GR)
16	29	PETTIDEE	<i>Thug Love</i> (Beatmart)
17	62	LECRAE	<i>Real Talk</i> (Cross Movement)
18	54	GEORGE HUFF	<i>Miracles</i> (Word)
19	4	L. SPENCER SMITH & TESTAMENT	<i>Statement</i> (Emtro)
20	70	DEITRICK HADDON	<i>Lost and Found</i> (Verity)

[TOP ADULT CONTEMPORARY/POP ALBUMS]

THIS WEEK	WEEKS ON CHIT	ARTIST	TITLE (Label)
★ 1	3	 VARIOUS	WOW Hits 2007 (Sparrow/EMI)
2	33	JEREMY CAMP	<i>Restored</i> (BEC)
3	61	CASTING CROWNS	<i>Lifesong</i> (Beach Street)
4	4	MARK SCHULTZ	<i>Broken & Beautiful</i> (Word)
5	27	MAT KEARNEY	<i>Nothing Left to Lose</i> (Inpop/Columbia)
6	2	THIRD DAY	<i>Christmas Offerings</i> (Essential)
7	7	JARS OF CLAY	<i>Good Monsters</i> (Essential)
8	4	AMY GRANT	<i>Time Again...Amy Grant Live</i> (Word)
9	11	SELAH	<i>Bless the Broken Road: The Duets</i> (Curb)
10	3	CASTING CROWNS	<i>Lifesong Live</i> (Beach Street)
11	26	MERCYME	<i>Coming Up to Breathe</i> (INO)
12	1	AVALON	<i>Faith: A Hymns Collection</i> (Sparrow)
13	87	MERCYME	<i>Almost There</i> (INO)
14	160	CASTING CROWNS	<i>Casting Crowns</i> (Beach Street)
15	4	PHILLIPS, CRAIG & DEAN	<i>Top of My Lungs</i> (INO)
16	83	NATALIE GRANT	<i>Awaken</i> (Curb)
17	4	BIG DADDY WEAVE	<i>Every Time I Breathe</i> (Fervent)
18	55	VARIOUS	<i>WOW Hits 2006</i> (Sparrow/EMI)
19	5	BEBO NORMAN	<i>Between the Dreaming and the Coming True</i> (Essential)
20	13	SANDI PATTY	<i>Hymns of Faith...Songs of Inspiration</i> (INO)

[TOP PRAISE & WORSHIP ALBUMS]

THIS WEEK	WEEKS ON CHIT	ARTIST	TITLE (Label)
★ 1	2	 CHRIS TOMLIN	See the Morning (sixsteps)
2	109	CHRIS TOMLIN	<i>Arriving</i> (sixsteps)
3	29	VARIOUS	<i>WOW Worship: Aqua</i> (Provident)
4	52	VARIOUS	<i>Open the Eyes of My Heart</i> (INO)
5	56	DAVID CROWDER BAND	<i>A Collision</i> (sixsteps)
6	7	HILLSONG	<i>Mighty to Save</i> (Integrity)
7	39	AARON SHUST	<i>Anything Worth Saying</i> (Brush/Word)
8	1	DELIRIOUS	<i>Now Is the Time</i> (Sparrow)
9	29	UNITED	<i>United We Stand</i> (Integrity)
10	29	PASSION WORSHIP BAND	<i>Passion: Everything Glorious</i> (sixsteps)
11	267	MICHAEL W. SMITH	<i>Worship</i> (Reunion)
12	52	RANDY TRAVIS	<i>Glory Train: Songs of Worship</i> (Word)
13	17	DAVID CROWDER BAND	<i>B Collision</i> (sixsteps)
14	19	VARIOUS	<i>Very Best of Praise & Worship</i> (Verity)
15	43	HILLSONG	<i>Ultimate Worship: Best of Hillsong</i> (Integrity)
16	20	VARIOUS	<i>Top 25 Praise Songs, 2007 Edition</i> (MARA)
17	33	VARIOUS	<i>Best Worship Songs Ever!</i> (WorshipTogether)
18	40	CHRIS TOMLIN	<i>Live from Austin Music Hall</i> (sixsteps)
19	77	AMY GRANT	<i>Rock of Ages...Hymns & Faith</i> (Word)
20	18	VARIOUS	<i>Worship: The Ultimate Collection</i> (Sparrow)

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>>> APRIL 28 IN HONOLULU, HAWAII; AUDIO A TO BE JOINED BY MERCYME, PHIL WICKHAM AND COMEDIAN BOB SMILEY

CCM STAFF PICKS

OUR CHOICES FOR THE BEST CHRISTIAN MARKET ALBUMS OF 2006



Chris Well
Contributing Editor

- 1. SOUL P., THE PREMIERE** (Beatmart) Hip, slick and soulful.
- 2. CINDY MORGAN, POSTCARDS** (Reunion) Heart-wrenching, spirit-challenging, singable art pop.
- 3. SWITCHFOOT, OH! GRAVITY.** (Columbia/Sparrow) Just when you think they've run out of surprises, here comes another great record. Huzzah!
- 4. DEITRICK HADDON, 7 DAYS** (Tyscot/Verity/Zomba) Mr. Haddon is, quite simply, an urban pop genius.
- 5. LEELAND, SOUND OF MELODIES** (Essential) Spacious, worshipful modern rock.
- 6. FRED HAMMOND, FREE TO WORSHIP** (Verity) The church will be singing these songs 'til Jesus comes back.
- 7. VIOLET BURNING, DROP-DEAD** (Northern) Dark, dreamy, frail human songs of faith and worship and love (both found and lost).
- 8. JARS OF CLAY, GOOD MONSTERS** (Essential) The band's most thoughtful, most challenging statement yet.
- 9. TONEX, OAK PARK: 92105** (Nureau Ink) Jacketed in Tonex's trademark brilliant nureau R&B-rock, the most vulnerable album ever released in the Christian market. (Awkwardly so.)
- 10. PILLAR, THE RECKONING** (Flicker) With this latest melodic hard rock feast, Pillar continues to explore its musical options in grand style.



Lindsay Williams
Assistant Editor

- 1. JARS OF CLAY, GOOD MONSTERS** (Essential) Soul-stirring and thought-provoking...the definitive album of their career.
- 2. CHRIS TOMLIN, SEE THE MORNING** (sixsteps) And you thought *Arriving* was good.
- 3. NEEDTOBREATHE, DAYLIGHT** (Lava/Atlantic/Sparrow) I loved this one from the very first listen—an amazing debut.
- 4. ADIE, DON'T WAIT** (BEC) This is the most beautiful, peaceful album I've heard in quite some time.
- 5. BRANDON HEATH, DON'T GET COMFORTABLE** (Reunion) Great lyrics, great voice; not one skippable song.
- 6. MATT WERTZ, EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN** (Handwritten) Why is this guy not signed?
- 7. LEELAND, SOUND OF MELODIES** (Essential) They've stolen my heart; yes, they have.
- 8. SHAWN MCDONALD, RIPEN** (Sparrow) Artistically unique and a complete breath of fresh air.
- 9. WATERMARK, A GRATEFUL PEOPLE** (Rocketown) A beautiful parting gift.
- 10. SANCTUS REAL, THE FACE OF LOVE** (Sparrow) Aggressively honest and real.



Kristi Henson
Media & Web Editor

- 1. JARS OF CLAY, GOOD MONSTERS** (Essential) This one's been stuck in my CD player for months...and it seems to replay tracks 3 & 5 over and over and over...
- 2. CINDY MORGAN, POSTCARDS** (Reunion) I love singer/songwriters (S/S), and they don't come any better than Cindy! I LOVE this record!
- 3. JONNY LANG, TURN AROUND** (A&M/Provident) If I didn't know better, I'd think Robert Johnson had just outrun his hellhound. Jonny's got rare genius.
- 4. BRANDON HEATH, DON'T GET COMFORTABLE** (Reunion) Just when you thought it was safe to get comfortable! Check out this fabulous S/S!
- 5. BRIAN LITRELL, WELCOME HOME** (Reunion) Backstreet's back, alright! Here's hoping Brian is never gone!
- 6. ROBERT RANDOLPH & THE FAMILY BAND, COLORBLIND** (Warner Bros.) He can do things with a pedal steel that should be illegal!
- 7. MATT WERTZ, EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN** (Handwritten) He's a great S/S...not to mention Brandon Heath's BFF. What's not to love?!
- 8. DECEMBERADID, DECEMBERADID** (Slanted) This one speaks to my Southern-fried roots! (And they ROCK!)
- 9. AYIESHA WOODS, INTRODUCING AYIESHA WOODS** (Gotee) This CD just makes me "Happy"!
- 10. VARIOUS ARTISTS, THREE WOODEN CROSSES** (Word) I'm the resident country music fanatic on the CCM staff...so I love this compilation!



Mary Sergent
Art Director

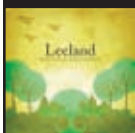
- 1. JARS OF CLAY, GOOD MONSTERS** (Essential) We named it "Album of the Year" in September. Need we say more?
- 2. ADIE, DON'T WAIT** (BEC) Seriously, *don't wait* to hear Mrs. Camp's artful solo debut!
- 3. LEELAND, SOUND OF MELODIES** (Essential) The best new band of the year, hands down. (Just ask Smitty.)
- 4. JONNY LANG, TURN AROUND** (A&M/Provident) Blues is back, and this time with gospel soul. The prodigy returns with another stellar album.
- 5. HAWK NELSON, SMILE, IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD** (Tooth & Nail) You'll smile (and jam) until the end of this one.
- 6. LEIGH NASH, BLUE ON BLUE** (One Son/Sony/Provident) She kissed Sixpence goodbye and says hello to an astonishing solo album.
- 7. ALAN JACKSON, PRECIOUS MEMORIES** (ACR/Arista Nashville) You don't have to be a country fan to appreciate these classic hymns.
- 8. CHRIS TOMLIN, SEE THE MORNING** (sixsteps) It's indescribable. It's unimaginable. It's just plain good.
- 9. SHAWN MCDONALD, RIPEN** (Sparrow) My freshest pick! The third time's the charm for McDonald with this creative offering.
- 10. MARK SCHULTZ, BROKEN & BEAUTIFUL** (Word) Break out the tissues! It's another tear jerker from the storytelling man himself.



Jay Swartzendruber
Editor

- 1. JARS OF CLAY, GOOD MONSTERS** (Essential) A lyrical giant, a musical beast.
- 2. JOHNNY CASH, AMERICAN V: A HUNDRED HIGHWAYS** (Lost Highway/EMI CMG) The last will and testament from the 20th century's greatest artist.
- 3. LEELAND, SOUND OF MELODIES** (Essential) Artful, worshipful rock so genuine, it'll disarm the honest cynic.
- 4. LEIGH NASH, BLUE ON BLUE** (One Son/Sony/Provident) Where angels cheer to tread...
- 5. SWITCHFOOT, OH! GRAVITY.** (Columbia/Sparrow) Extremely smart and sure to be a personal staple over the long haul.
- 6. MICHELLE TUMES, MICHELLE TUMES** (Levantar/Infinity) With all due respect, Enya was *never* this good.
- 7. STARFLYER 59, MY ISLAND** (Tooth & Nail) How can a band be this brilliant and still be such a secret after so many years?
- 8. AYIESHA WOODS, INTRODUCING AYIESHA WOODS** (Gotee) As if the music wasn't great enough, she has to throw in that thick, rich voice, too!
- 9. CINDY MORGAN, POSTCARDS** (Reunion) I want to be as brave as her...
- 10. HAWK NELSON, SMILE, IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD** (Tooth & Nail) Hmm...maybe Canadians *will* rule the world.

CCM'S DEBUT OF THE YEAR



LEELAND
SOUND OF MELODIES (Essential)

- Highest combined ranking
- Appears on 4 of 5 lists
- Top 5 on 3 lists



➤ SUPERgirl

One of the big successes of the new TV season is the sci-fi serial “**Heroes**.” Just as the show began to hit critical mass—with multiple showings a week—NBC began to promote the show in TV and radio spots with the **Krystal Meyers** song “Together,” from her latest album, *Dying For A Heart* (Essential). “As soon as my record label told me, I freaked out,” says an excited Meyers. “It’s an awesome opportunity, and I am very thankful for it.”



SHOCK TACTICS

>>> Speaking of superheroes, the co-creator of the much-watched, award-winning Kids WB and Cartoon Network series “Static Shock” has launched a line of Christian kids comics. **The Guardian Line**, the biggest launch in comics’ history for African American content, is masterminded by **Michael Davis**, co-founder of Milestone Media and former president and CEO of Motown Animation and Filmworks. The Guardian Line includes four separate series targeting specific age groups. With distribution into comics stores, this puts them on shelves with Batman and X-Men.



➔ WELCOME, SPORTS FANS

>>> Fox Sports coverage of the **World Series** included the **NEEDTOBREATHE** song “Don’t Wait For Daylight,” from the band’s acclaimed debut, *Daylight* (Lava/Atlantic/Sparrow). (Meanwhile, World Series contender **Detroit Tigers** pitcher **Todd Jones**’ favorite band is **MercyMe**. As *USA Today* put it: “Instead of blaring heavy metal or rap, Comerica Park plays ‘Last One Standing,’ a song written for him by MercyMe, his favorite Christian rock group.”)

In other **NEEDTOBREATHE** news, the band’s song “Shine On” was featured during a key moment in the film *Employee of the Month*.

PIGGING OUT

Amy Grant, **Vince Gill** and **Randy Travis** are lending their vocal talents to the new animated DVD series **On the Farm with Farmer Bob**. Each DVD combines literary components with Bible-based, entertaining stories to help teach kids to read, write and do the right thing. “I loved playing the character of Porkchop,” says Travis, “because I believe this series has the power to enhance and change kids’ lives. Besides, what other farm in the world grows the letters in alphabet soup?”



Answer: The greatest game in magazine history! **Question:** What is **CCM Jeopardy**? This month, we’ve given the answers to **HAWK NELSON’S JASON DUNN**. With the release of *Smile, It’s the End of the World* (Tooth & Nail), Hawk Nelson upped the proverbial ante...in a big way. Recently, mtvU featured the band in the Top 5 countdown on the “Freshman Show,” and Hawk was overwhelmingly voted No. 1 for the week. FUSE TV also showcased the band online, saying, “Check out their dynamic sophomore effort, and see why they are one of our biggest buzz bands of the year!” (more info at hawknelson.com). So, Jason Dunn & Co. are certainly *smiling* these days...but will Jason *smile* as he questions our answers?

CCM’s A: *The only reality TV show that I would have a chance to win*
Jason’s Q: What is “Survivor”?

CCM’s A: *A classic album everyone should own*
Jason’s Q: What is Michael W. Smith’s *Change Your World*?

CCM’s A: *Major Nelson; full nelson; Hudson Hawk*
Jason’s Q: Who is Hawk Nelson? No, seriously! Who is he?

CCM’s A: *The first event to which I would take a time machine*
Jason’s Q: What is the discovery of America?

CCM’s A: *It takes a lickin’ and keeps on tickin’*
Jason’s Q: Who is GORD (our van)?

CCM’s A: *It’s the end of the world as we know it*
Jason’s Q: Who is R.E.M.?

CCM’s A: *8675309*
Jason’s Q: What is my ex-girlfriend’s phone number?

CCM’s A: *The only other band I’d like to be in*
Jason’s Q: Who is Goldfinger?

CCM’s A: *If I weren’t an artist, this would be my occupation*
Jason’s Q: What is a producer?

CCM’s A: *It’s a wonderful life*
Jason’s Q: What is...yes...it is, INDEED?

CCM’s A: *Who or what I wanted to be when I grew up*
Jason’s Q: What is a hockey player?

CCM’s A: *Why I love CCM Magazine*
Jason’s Q: What is...is this a trick question?

CCM’s A: *The most puzzling verse/story in the Bible*
Jason’s Q: What is the story of Jonah?



Keep up with the latest “SIGHTINGS” weekdays at CCMmagazine.com.



* A compendium of arguably useless and "researched" musings



HO, HO, HO: 5 CHRISTMAS SONGS OF NOTE

It's that special time of year, when millions of people all over the world ignore the warnings of Jeremiah 10:3-4 and pick out Christmas trees, set them up in the center of homes, and string them with lights and popcorn and collectible ornaments made by the good people at Hallmark. We also listen to a lot of special music to get us in the holiday mood. Such as these five songs...

1. "The Christmas Shoes" [NEWSONG]

Inspired by the true story written by Helga Schmidt, not even veteran group Newsong could have expected the veritable industry that sprouted from this heart-wrenching holiday ballad when it was simply a bonus track on 2000's *Sheltering Tree* (Benson). The song rocketed to the top of the charts—and soon launched a series of best-selling Christmas novels and even two highly rated TV movies.

2. "You're a Mean One, Mr. Grinch" [SIXPENCE NONE THE RICHER]

This ode to a creep, from the perennial Dr. Seuss classic "How the Grinch Stole Christmas," was originally recorded for the 1996 compilation *Christmas in Heaven* (Flying Tart). Recorded during particularly trying times for the band, an alternate—and unreleased—take of the song actually went, "You're a mean one, R.E.X. ..."

3. "Mary, Did You Know" [MICHAEL ENGLISH]

Songwriters Mark Lowry and Buddy Greene wrote this chestnut in 1990, but it has already become a favorite of many. Popularized in 1992 by Michael English, it has since been recorded by more than 30 different artists, from country greats (Reba McEntire, Kenny Rogers, Billy Dean) to Broadway stars (Michael Crawford) to pop icons from yesterday (Tony Orlando & Dawn, Donny Osmond) and today (Natalie Cole, Clay Aiken).

4. "Oh, Santa" [VEGGIETALES]

Only Larry the Cucumber could concoct a Christmas song that guest-stars a crafty bank robber, a savage Norseman and an agent of the Internal Revenue Service ("Did you claim that?"). By song's end, the real Santa shows up to fight crime and take names. You just can't beat that for holiday spirit.

5. "Breath of Heaven (Mary's Song)" [AMY GRANT]

When songwriter Chris Eaton wrote the haunting "Breath of Heaven," it was not actually about Christmas—until Amy Grant refashioned it into the elegant "Breath of Heaven (Mary's Song)," since recorded by the likes of Sara Groves, Donna Summer and Jessica Simpson. In a related story, Jaci Velasquez once recorded Chris Eaton's "God So Loved the World" and later reworked the song into "One Silent Night (God So Loved the World)." Which makes us wonder whether Mr. Eaton ever wrote any Christmas songs on purpose.



SURPRISES IN VEGGIETALES CREATOR PHIL VISCHER'S MEMOIR, ME, MYSELF AND BOB (NELSON)

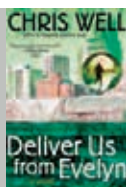
- [1] Crossover plans with *Left Behind* fell through because Larry is a mid-tribber.
- [2] Early cast member Karl the Killer Kale left the show after gambling problem came to light.
- [3] Bob hates it when you pinch him. (Who knew?)

CHRISTMAS SLOGANS WE COULD DO WITHOUT

- [1] "Happy Non-Descript Religious Observance!"
- [2] "He sees you when you're sleeping. Be afraid. Very afraid."
- [3] "We put the 'X' in Christmas!"



Chris wants to remind everyone that the laugh-out-loud thriller *Deliver Us From Evelyn* makes an excellent Christmas gift. Proceeds from every sale go toward helping maintain the lavish lifestyle to which he has grown accustomed.





industrybeat

by Jay Swartzendruber



Good Morning, America!



If you enjoy listening to Christian radio, then there's a good chance you already start each weekday by tuning into "Doug & Kim—Your Family-Friendly Morning Show." Now in its third year, the syndicated program is currently heard on 90 affiliated radio stations across America and live online with listenership worldwide. Produced by Today's Christian Music radio network (owned by Salem Communications, which also owns *CCM Magazine*), the show airs every Monday thru Friday from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. (EST). Co-host Doug Griffin has been in radio for almost two decades. The Newport Beach, California-native has worked at several stations including San Francisco's KSOL (where he was "Doug EE Fresh" the traffic rapper) and six years as "Jungle Doug" on KRTY/Country in San Jose. Doug also spent three years co-hosting radio's nationally-syndicated "Doug & Connie/Doug & Karla" morning show and worked with Salem Communication's Christian music channels on XM Satellite Radio. His on-air partner, Santa Fe, New Mexico-native Kim Bindel, has been in radio for 12 years, with previous stations including KWLD (Plainview, Texas), KSLT (Rapid City, S.D.), Free 107 (Lubbock, Texas) and WAY-FM (Nashville). She also worked with Salem's XM station The Fish. For more info or to listen to "Doug & Kim—Your Family-Friendly Morning Show" online, visit dkradio.com.

What's been your all-time favorite experience in radio so far?

Doug: Broadcasting from some remote locations has been pretty awesome. I've broadcast from England for the release of a Delirious CD, and I've done the show from New York after cruising past the Statue of Liberty with the newsboys.

Kim: One of my first interviews back in college was with a man who held the world record for spinning the most basketballs at one time. It was up hill from there. I loved getting my daughters—who were little at the time—to talk on the radio. A recent highlight was hosting a radio broadcast in New York City with other talented announcers (Hi, Kevin and Taylor) for Point of Grace as they were getting set to release *I Choose You*. (Thank you, Joe Battaglia!) One of the highlights for us as a team was "big voicing" the GMA Music Awards—thanks to producer Steve Gilreath.

A conversation with Doug & Kim

What was your most embarrassing on-air moment?

Kim: Just one? There are so many to choose from. There have been times when we left the mics on when we thought we turned them off...oops! Or times when words just came out "wrong"...yep, I will leave it there.

Doug?

Doug: [Nothing but crickets...]

Okay, well...Doug, I understand you met your wife, Sheryl, through the station you worked at when you were "Jungle Doug"?

Doug: Yes, but she'll tell you that she was not a groupie. She just wanted to see the face behind the voice. And after she got the scary part over, we got married.

What sets your show apart from other popular Christian morning shows?

Doug: Being on commercial and non-commercial (listener supported) stations gives us a broad brush to paint with. We feel we are not hemmed in to only talk about "Christian" stuff. We want to talk about life, family, pop culture, comedy...all topics.

How does your faith manifest itself on the air?

Doug: As a Christian I know I don't have the answers, but at least I can point to someone who does. In the midst of crisis, we can offer music that touches the part that's hurting. One of our signature bits is our weekly "Love on your Kids Friday"—this grew out of all the news of bad stuff happening to kids. So each week we take listeners' calls and help them love and affirm their kids. Fridays are great—very emotional, with a deep connection to the listener.

Kim: I have an open mic that God has entrusted to me to share and comment on the topics of the day. I am a participant along with the listener as to what God will say through the music and through the morning. Before each show begins, Doug and I pray that God would do whatever He wants with the next four hours and that we would stay out of His way.

Who was your favorite radio interview and why?

Doug: I always enjoy Rebecca St James. She's the only artist I know that always prays before each and every interview—in person, on the phone, it doesn't matter; she wants God to be a part of it. I respect and admire her commitment to Christ.

Kim: I have enjoyed spending time with Rebecca, too. She was my first artist interview back in college, and we were both beginning our career journeys. We talked about our grandmothers. She prayed before we started our interview, and she hasn't stopped doing that. Interviews I have also enjoyed along the way have been with Jars of Clay (We are constantly on our toes.) and deep thinkers and jokers like Chris Rice, Michael O'Brien and Tammy Trent.

I understand your show features an annual battle for the title of "Christmas Novelty Song of the Year"...

Doug: Yes, this past year I won with "Put One Foot in Front of the Other"—beating Kim's "Frosty The Snowman." The prior two years, Kim won with "I Want a Hippopotamus for Christmas" and "The Chipmunk Song (Christmas Don't Be Late)." My first two entries were from *It's a Cow Christmas*—"Deck the Stalls with Oats and Barley" and "We Wish You a Dairy Christmas." I got huge support for the cow songs—especially from the heartland of America. And come on, cows were more likely to be in the manger next to baby Jesus compared to those rats...I mean, chipmunks.

Kim: Our listeners are very connected to this tradition of our show! They are also very aware of Doug's blatant political schemes to sway voters. In the end, the accuracy of our listeners has shined through, voting for my song as the winner! (Last year we were still waiting to hear from Florida...still waiting.)

>>> her 1998 album, *Pray* (Forefront), was recently certified gold, surpassing the 500,000 mark in sales



thewriter'sblock

by Matthew West



CHRISTMAS IN JULY

Chestnuts roasting on an open fire...Jack Frost nipping at your nose...

...And I am now officially in the Christmas spirit. The picturesque poetry in the classic “The Christmas Song” always has a way of painting a Christmas canvas in my imagination. Every November before Thanksgiving, I pull out my CD, *Christmas with the Crooners*, a collection of holiday standards sung by the velvet voices of generations past. I then proceed to drive my wife crazy as I proudly declare, (using my best old-school radio disc jockey impersonation), “FROM NOW UNTIL NEW YEAR’S, IT’S ALL CHRISTMAS TUNES, ALL THE TIME!” I just love the way holiday carols take me to the sights, scents and sounds of my favorite season.

Everybody knows a turkey and some mistletoe...Help to make the season bright...

When I hear the notes of Nat King Cole carry imagery of those words, I picture the composers of such a song wearing turtlenecks and red Christmas sweaters, sitting at an old upright piano, sipping a cup of eggnog. I imagine the writers looking out of a snow-frosted window on Christmas Eve, having to do little more than simply describe their seasonal surroundings. But get this: Mel Torme and Bob Wells didn’t write “The Christmas Song” on Christmas Eve. Nor was the tune composed on Christmas Day. As a matter of fact, they didn’t even write it in a month that had the slightest chance of snow. “The Christmas Song” was written in July of 1944, on the hottest day of the year! And I’m pretty sure there were no “folks dressed up like Eskimos” on that sweltering summer day. In response to his unusual inspiration to write a Christmas song in July, Mel simply replied, “It was a way to cool down.”

This past summer I was presented with a similar assignment. Eddie Carswell, founding member of the group NewSong, called me up one day in July with, guess what? An idea for a Christmas song. Eddie and NewSong are no strangers to great Christmas tunes, having contributed new standards over the years

such as “The Christmas Shoes,” which also became a best-selling book and an ABC movie. I was honored by the invitation to write for their Christmas album, but it was 85 degrees in Nashville, and there wasn’t a jingle bell in sight. So, on my way to the studio to write with Eddie, I pulled out the old Christmas collection and tried to think cold thoughts. Although we felt a bit awkward at first, we cranked up the air conditioning and dared to dig for some out-of-season inspiration. The song, “The Christmas Hope,” is the title track of their upcoming Christmas release.

Inspiration is unpredictable. It knows no season. But great songwriting is being willing to write about mistletoe in the middle of a heat wave. Life is equally unpredictable, and following God’s plan for the song of our lives doesn’t always make sense in the moment. Sometimes God calls us “out of season” and into something that feels as crazy as, well, Christmas in July.

Jim Cymbala, pastor of the Brooklyn Tabernacle, tells a fitting story of an “out of season” moment that occurred many years ago during a service on a hot summer night. “...It was 90 degrees outside and probably 100 degrees in the building. I felt oddly impressed to lead ‘Silent Night’ as an expression of love to Jesus. A drunk was passing by to listen. In his confused brain he said to himself, ‘This drinking problem of mine is getting

SONGWRITING TIP #12:

DON'T BE AFRAID TO WRITE ABOUT MISTLETOE IN THE MIDDLE OF A HEAT WAVE. INSPIRATION IS NEVER OUT OF SEASON.

totally out of hand. Now I'm hearing Christmas carols. I'd better go into this church and get some help!” Pastor Cymbala could have dismissed God’s leading as a silly “out of season” idea. But instead, he was obedient, and God used the song of his life in that moment to touch a heart in need.

This Christmas, let the song of your life be led by the One who has already written your story. God has a huge plan for you, filled with some of the most amazing “out of season” moments. Follow His lead, and Christmas in July won’t seem so crazy after all.

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



SPUR58 WIDE AWAKE IN AMERICA

SPUR58 is a five-piece band from Houston, Texas, featuring lead singer Aaron Ivey, guitarists Jimmie Ingram and Chad Martin, bassist Steven Bush and drummer Guy Roberts. **SPUR58's** national debut album, **SLEEPWALKERS** (Indelible), which released in October, was produced by Paul Mills (Jason Morant, Lincoln Brewster, Among Thorns). The band combines melodic guitar and piano driven pop/rock with honest, accessible lyrics. **SPUR58** says that its "heart is leading worship, but that doesn't always mean getting people to sing along." Check out more about this band at spur58.com and myspace.com/spur58.

PAUL: Tell us about the band name.

AARON: Well, we didn't have a band name for a long time. We just couldn't think of anything that didn't sound lame! So one day, a friend and I were driving in Sugar Land, Texas (our hometown), and noticed we were on a street called **SPUR58**. The rest is history.

PAUL: How does **SPUR58** lead worship?

AARON: As a band, we really want people to be a part of corporate worship experiences. But we also desire people to leave a concert with this mindset: God is more interested in how we live our lives than the songs that we sing. As worship leaders, we want to encourage people to make a literal connection between songs that we sing as worshipers and the day-to-day life that we live. If our worship is solely based on singing songs, we have missed the mark of being a true biblical worshiper. We hope that the songs on this record inspire both the outward corporate worship experience and the inner worship experience that take place in each of us every day.

PAUL: Tell us about your record, *Sleepwalkers*. What's it all about?

AARON: The record is a plea to followers of Christ to be all that He has created us to be. I have a friend named Cody who is a real-life sleepwalker. In the middle of the night, he gets up and walks around with no clue what he's done the next morning. I thought about how this relates to us as humans so many times. We are so focused on our own agendas, dreams and goals that we miss life all around us. We are numb to love, calloused to pain and alive—but not in love. We get so caught up in ourselves sometimes we miss out on being the light of the world. The record asks people to wake up and notice life...notice pain, notice love, notice joy and notice people.

Rapper and hip-hop artist **Soul P.** has had the kind of life that would make a hit Hollywood film. He grew up on the streets of Seattle and had a tough home life. He fought his way through and, at age 17, found himself in a church amazed to hear people rapping about the love of God. He gave his life to Christ and began a career as a hip-hop artist. Soul P.'s first national project, **THE PREMIERE** (Beatmart), was produced by Todd Collins (GRITS, KJ-52) and hits stores December 26. Read more about Soul P.'s powerful music and testimony at: soulmusic.com and myspace.com/soulp.

PAUL: I read your testimony. Life was hard for you. How has it made you view your own role as a parent?

SOUL P.: I view my role as a parent as something that will play a big part in my children being successful in life—knowing that they have me as a valid support system for them no matter what happens in life. I want to be always available for them, someone they can trust. I just can't imagine not being with them as they grow up. My son saved my life, so I can't help but give him as much love as I possibly can by the grace of God.

PAUL: What lyric on your new record feels the most powerful when you do it live?

SOUL P.: A few bars from the last song on the album, "All I Want": *A bottle full of sins, that I sent out to sea/With a message full of hope came back to me/As I opened up my past/I seen a letter full of light/That said Christ died for me/And when He did, I came alive.*

PAUL: You have a song "Do My Thang." What is the thing you feel God has given you to do?

SOUL P.: To speak honesty through my music and share experiences through the music that everybody can relate with—with Christ's love being the message and the answer for a lot of people that are hurting, including me.

PAUL: If you could open for a mainstream rap/hip-hop artist on a tour, who would it be and why?

SOUL P.: Well, as far as Christian music, I know he's not a "rap/hip-hop" artist, but tobyMac, 'cause he sells out spots and his live show is crazy and I know I would have a good time. And, in the general market right now, it would have to be Jay-Z. I know it would be a real live show—plus, in front of all those people, give me 20 minutes, and I'm a make it happen. And, again, I know all of the shows would be real live.

Soul P. THE SOUL EFFECT





Matt Papa SINGING UNTO THE ONE

MATT PAPA is a singer/songwriter/worship leader from Atlanta, Georgia. He began leading worship at the age of 14, and it wasn't long before he was traveling the country performing in churches, colleges and coffee houses. Matt's debut label recording, **YOU ARE GOOD** (Spin 360), was produced by Stephen Leiweke (Plumb, Joel Engle) and released in October. See mattpapa.com and myspace.com/mattpapaband for more info.

PAUL: *Define success for your music.*

MATT: "The glory of God and the refreshment of the soul."—Johann Sebastian Bach

PAUL: *As a worship leader, do you find it hard to be led in worship by another leader if he or she is not particularly skilled or the band is not that good?*

MATT: Yes. But, in my early experience as a worship leader, a lot of people showed me a lot of grace when I wasn't any good; so I try to do the same. If the heart is there and the music is not completely painful and distracting, then I can focus on Christ.

PAUL: *This is the first record you have made. How was it?*

MATT: An incredible journey! I drove up to Nashville not knowing who my producer was or even what the title "producer" meant. The album was released on an independent level this past January, and God really used it in some cool ways and took it some really neat places. Now, it's been released on a national level, and I cannot believe everything God has done! It is a complete testimony to the power of prayer and the power of God.

PAUL: *Which song from your record do you feel best leads people to worship God and why?*

MATT: If by "leads people" you mean congregationally, then I would say the song that best does that is "Unto the One." It is very easy to learn and easy to sing. Lyrically, it comes straight from Revelation 5 and is incredibly God-ward and Christ centered. It shows the worthiness of Jesus through the beauty and the victory of what He has done for us.

Band Wagon

BY KRISTI HENSON

Go ahead! Jump on the "Band Wagon"—a column in which we follow the evolving careers of three promising new artists. This month, we check in again with **LEELAND**.



When we connected with Leeland's drummer, Mike Smith, one October afternoon for an update on the band, he proudly announced, "I'm getting ready to get married tomorrow!" Talk about dedication! Doing an interview on the eve of your wedding? We knew these guys have what it takes! But it gets even better as Smith confesses, "So the day after I get married, my wife and I are going to be flying out to Jackson, Miss., to meet up with the guys; and I'm playing a show. And she's going to get to come out and be with me, so she's really excited about that because it originally started as a joke. I was going to get a fill-in [for this show with Third Day], and I said something to her one day. And she turned and looked at me kind of bright-eyed; she was like, 'That'll be pretty cool, actually, to be able to do that.' So we're going to fly out there [and do the show], and then we're going to go on our honeymoon," he enthuses.

Leeland has enjoyed a pretty cool fall, opening for Third Day on part of the "Wherever You Are Tour." "It's been so amazing and such a dream come true just to be able to share the stage with people that you looked up to growing up," he says of Third Day. "They've been so awesome, just giving me wisdom about marriage and things like that. They've been doing it for a long time and been married for a while, so that's been neat."

Looking forward, Smith says this month they'll be "taking some time off, for the holidays for one, but just to be able to stay home and start working on some new stuff. We've got a few new songs, [and] we try to work on them as much as we can during soundchecks." But, he explains, it's nice to have time to devote to "just writing."

And what about New Year's resolutions? "As far as the band is concerned, we just want to continue to grow," says Smith. "I think we're just growing by leaps and bounds every week and every day actually—just getting closer together. And I know that all of us have committed to getting that much closer to God, just because being out on the road is tough. We've got good family backing at home to take care of us and pray for us, but, ultimately, we've got to be accountable with each other on the road and just be accountable to God. So I know that's one thing that we've set forth that'll probably go into the New Year's resolutions, too—to just seek God."

Get more info on Leeland at leelandonline.com and myspace.com/leelandmusic.

Singer/songwriter/author Paul Colman, the former front man of GRAMMY®-nominated and Dove Award-winning act Paul Colman Trio, is also the newsboys' guitarist. The newsboys' new album, **GO** (Inpop), released in October. The latest single from Paul's current solo album, **LET IT GO** (Inpop), is "Holding Onto You." He currently tours, speaks and performs internationally. For more information, visit paulcolman.com.



livingthemessage

by Michael W. Smith



“Mephibosheth bowed down and said, ‘What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?’”
—2 Samuel 9:8 (NIV)

Do You Know Who You Are?

“If I have any one message I think I’ll preach for the rest of my life, it’s that I feel like I have to let people know who they really are.” After we heard MICHAEL W. SMITH say this in last month’s cover story interview, we knew who should author our next “Living The Message” devotional. We’re pleased he took us up on the invitation...

A lot of the church doesn’t know who they are. This is something I’m really passionate about—I think one of my responsibilities for the rest of my life is to remind the church of who they are.

There’s a story in 1st and 2nd Samuel where David makes a covenant with Jonathan, the son of King Saul. David asks Jonathan what he wants, and Jonathan replies, “If you’ll just look after my family, that’s all I ask.” As you may recall, King Saul and Jonathan die, and, all of a sudden, one kingdom switches. And David’s going to come into power—the new kingdom. If you read the history, the people in the palace—those members of the former kingdom—were pretty much murdered.

As five-year-old Mephibosheth’s nurse is running out of the palace, he’s dropped and crippled for the rest of his life. Thereafter, he’s probably in hiding, and he’s thinking that if David ever found him, David would kill him. The years went by, and then one day David brought in one of King Saul’s former servants and said, “Ziba, are you sure there’s not anyone left from the lineage of Jonathan?” And Ziba said, “There is one, and his name is Mephibosheth.”

“When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor. David said, ‘Mephibosheth!’ ‘Your servant,’ he replied. ‘Don’t be afraid,’ David said to him, ‘for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table.’”

Mephibosheth bowed down and said, ‘What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?’—2 Samuel 9:6-8 (NIV)

David sent for Mephibosheth, and I’m sure Mephibosheth thought, “*This is it! I’m going to lose my head!*” So Mephibosheth appears in the palace before King David, and David asks, “Are you Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan?” And Mephibosheth answers, “Yes I am, King David.” David says, “Because of the covenant that I made with your father, Jonathan, you will eat at the King’s table all the days of your life.”

Mephibosheth’s response is, “Oh, King David, what is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?” Interesting! It says—in the NIV—“dead dog.” Just low self-esteem, below the bar. You can read into that in a lot of different ways, “that you should notice a dead dog like me.” But David immediately decrees, “From this day forth, you’ll inherit everything that your father Jonathan had.” And, in an instant, Mephibosheth became the second richest man in the kingdom.

To me, the story asks us, “Are you Mephibosheth?” And the Lord promises, “Because of the covenant I made, your position is that you will eat at the King’s table for all the days of your life. Your possession is that you will inherit everything that Jonathan had.” And please believe me, I’m

“...the same power that raised Jesus from the dead now lives in you.”

not talking about prosperity here. This has nothing to do with prosperity. This has to do with the covenant that was made. If you parallel the new covenant, if you say, “Look, we are sons and daughters of the High King, the God of the Universe,” if you believe we are really children of God, do you not think there are some benefits to being sons and daughters of the High King? We in the church certainly don’t act like it.



And my whole story is that I can look in the mirror and like who I am. It doesn't have anything to do with me making records or playing the piano. I like who I am; I like who I'm becoming, because I know who I am. There are so many scriptures that tell us who we are. For instance, just take one—take the fact that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead now lives in you. Hello?! If that is true, and then if everybody really believed just that one scripture and really believed who they are, I think the world would be a completely different place. And I think the church would be a force to be reckoned with.

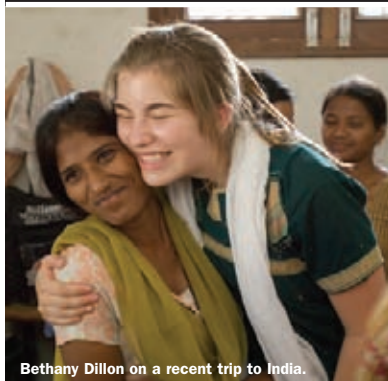
But we have people raised in legalistic churches—"Do all the right things..." (Yet, our place in Christ—our salvation—is a gift. It's the new covenant.) And many are raised under "word curses" like "You'll never amount to anything." We have people wallowing around going, "I can't get it together"—they don't like themselves. And it's all just attack. To be blunt, it's spiritual warfare. I think it's the number one thing that Satan does. He's here to kill, steal and destroy your life; and I think his number one attack mode is to tear you down emotionally.

I get it every day. I hear it, and usually what I sense in my spirit is, "Who do you think you are?" And my response is, "Hey, get behind me! I don't want to hear it!" I rebuke him because I know who I am. What if I sat here and entertained the idea of "Oh gosh, I really am a basket case. What am I doing pastoring a church? What am I doing making records? Oh, I'm worth nothing." A lot of people believe those lies. But I know who I am, and that's why there's power in the light. That's why I'm optimistic. That's why I'm positive. Because I know who I am. I know who I belong to.

And if the church—every person who really is a follower of God, a true believer in Jesus the Messiah—got that and could look in the mirror and know who they are, then watch out! It would be like a wildfire that you would not be able to stop! Neighborhoods would change; towns would change; cities would change; this country would indeed change. There would be very few orphans... Africa would change. It would just be amazing.

That's the message to me. Love God with all your heart, love your neighbor as yourself, come into salvation and then know who you are. That's the message that I think will change the world.

[Planting Churches, Saving Lives]



Bethany Dillon on a recent trip to India.



TMX Tickle Me Elmo will become the laughing stock of the Christmas season against the most under-promoted gift of the year—the water buffalo.

The relief organization Gospel for Asia is sponsoring an atypical holiday catalog online this season. Individuals or groups can purchase on behalf of beneficiaries the domesticated bovine, for example, which can provide a village family transportation, work to plow a field and provide milk. No regifting worries here.

Sparrow Records singer/songwriter **Bethany Dillon** recently signed on to help promote the organization and its mission: "...to be devout followers of Christ and to fulfill the Great Commission among the unreached [sic] in Asia through training, sending out and assisting qualified labors in partnership with the Body of Christ," according to online resources.

For several years now Dillon's family has been supporting, in various ways, two missionary families affiliated with Gospel for Asia.

"I remember seeing a little video clip about the 'native missionary movement' in India at church camp the summer I was nine years old and feeling so moved for that country," she shares. Last June, Dillon had the chance to meet one of the missionaries her family supports.

"We (my Dad, brother and I) sat in a room with [the missionary] and got to hear how he came to know Jesus... Getting to look into his eyes and hear the affection in his voice for the Kingdom and for the lost was life changing." Dillon also met the two children she sponsors through Gospel for Asia's "Bridge of Hope" program.

"Most of GFA's ministry is to the Dalit people, who are considered sub-human in India. They live in slums and have no hope of things ever getting better for them," Dillon explains. She adds that

because of the socioeconomic caste system, "hundreds of millions of people are oppressed and hated from the moment they're born to the moment they die." Gospel for Asia works to share the hope of Jesus Christ, through child sponsorship programs, evangelism teams, books and literature, radio and TV broadcasts and more.

"What is unique about GFA to me," Dillon says, "is the perspective on missions. K.P. Yohannan, founder and president of Gospel for Asia, had a vision for sending Indians to their own people...to avoid that barrier of culture, language, life experience, etc. But more importantly, what I've witnessed firsthand about GFA's work in India is that it all goes to the field—100 percent of what you give. The heart of what they are doing is so remarkably pure..."

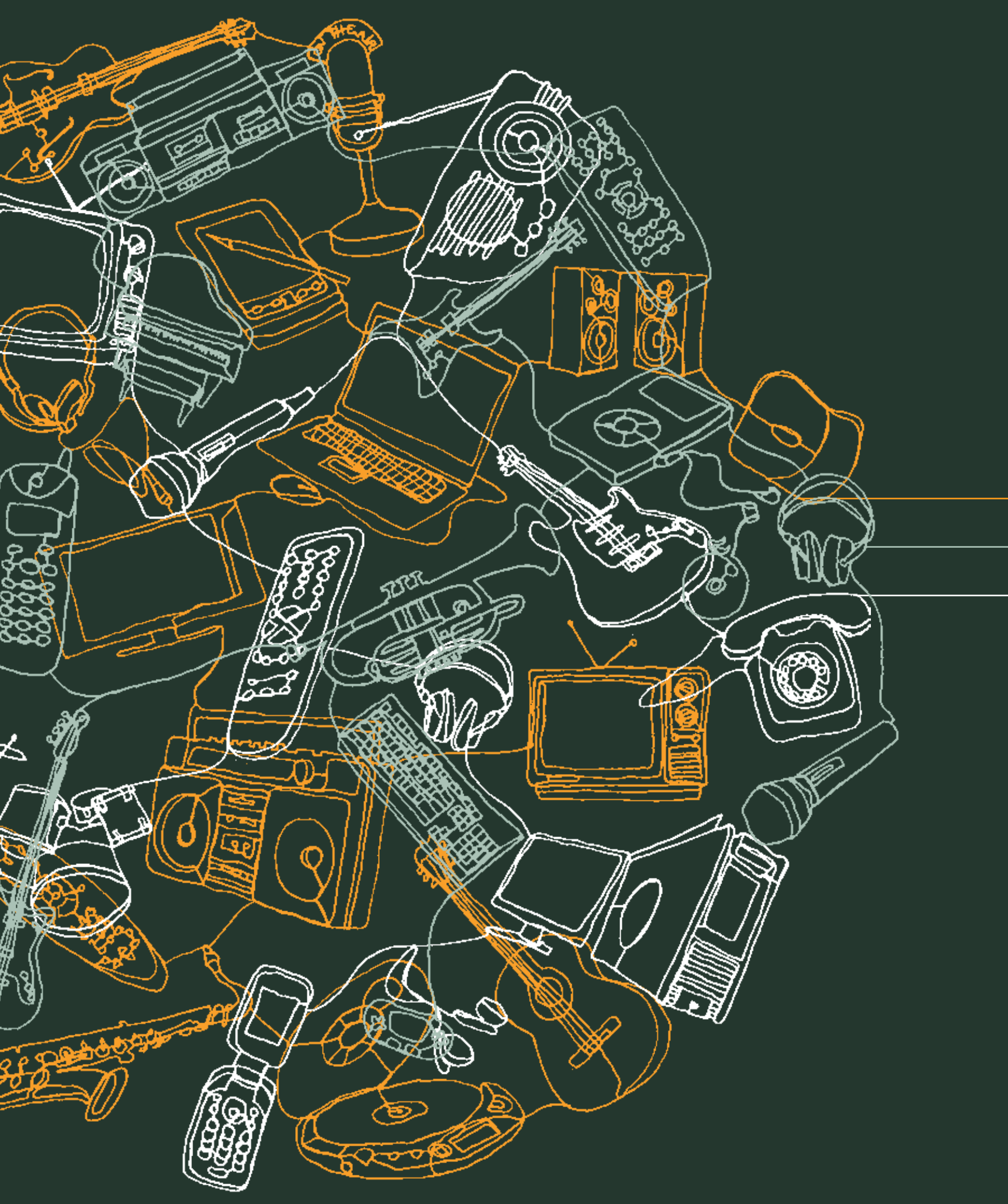
Which brings us back to the aforementioned water buffalo. Inroads to helping Gospel for Asia are illustrated in the group's Christmas catalog. There, GFA supporters can sponsor a missionary family; assist a child with food, clothing, education and spiritual direction; or help to provide tools and livestock to create personal and communal sustainability—gifts giving new life and new hope.

"I encourage everyone to just go to their website—gfa.org," Bethany advises. "Read stories from the mission field. Find out about the different ministries that Gospel for Asia's staff is continually dreaming up. Look at the pictures of the body of Christ, and see the light in their eyes."

As Dillon prepares for her upcoming record, she says her experiences with Gospel for Asia, plus her summer trip to India, are inspiring her writing and broadening her understanding of God's mercy and compassion.

"Let [your involvement] soften your heart," she says. "Listen to the voice of Jesus in it. I want everyone to be able to sow into that fertile ground."

Reunion Records recording artist Michael W. Smith is the lead pastor of New River Fellowship church in Franklin, Tenn.



Believe it or not, there was a day in the not too distant past when artists would use the United States Postal Service to send their fans newsletters. What a difference a decade makes...

There's no talking about music these days without mentioning some kind of technological tool that didn't even exist a decade ago. Today, breakthrough artists are building international followings by the tens of thousands on websites such as MySpace, Pure Volume, Xanga and YouTube. Yesteryear's \$200,000 recording budgets have been replaced by scores of hit records made for much less than \$50,000 and recorded on laptops and in college dorms. Fans are in on the act, creating their own websites, home-made videos and street teams to support their favorite bands. And label reps are signing bands based more on Internet action than club gigs. ¶ Relatively few media options long made it possible—though expensive—to reach mil-

lions with a song or a brand.
Digital compression,
however,

THE NEW MUSIC REVOLUTION

BY JOHN L. THOMPSON

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MARY SERGENT

has changed all that. From wildly increased television options, to numerous digital radio alternatives and albums delivered instantly and electronically, it has become increasingly difficult to reach large audiences with a single message. On the other side of the equation, little guys now have access to millions of fans without spending millions of dollars. The Web has proven to be the great equalizer, giving fans more options, artists more access and traditional gate-keepers—such as labels, radio and retailers—some real competition. ¶ A quick glance through the world of MySpace, the community-driven web portal that, according to the company, started as a networking place for creative types and turned into as big a cultural phenomenon as MTV ever was, shows that anyone with a song, a computer and a little bit of desire can offer their wares up to the universe. But we're not talking all indie wannabes here—not by a long shot. Major, multi-million selling artists are embracing new tools such as MySpace and YouTube in a big way. Motion Picture companies are promoting blockbuster films there. DIY videos have become ad campaigns for brands like Coke and McDonalds. Christian artists have jumped in hard, and early, seeing new ways to reach out to a previously untouched audience and to keep in touch with their base of supporters at the same time. Sometimes those worlds collide, and sparks fly—just ask **Skillet**.

WIN FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE

The modern rock act has already found itself in trouble with parents and youth pastors a couple times, thanks to some of the public feedback the band has received within its MySpace community. Skillet's MySpace page (MySpace.com/SkilletMusic) currently boasts more than 50,000 "friends"—essentially a large opt-in network of people interested in the artist's work—and non-believing fans sometimes discover the site and post positive comments complete with the occasional expletive. The blowback irritated front man John Cooper. "We want to reach out to the world and have a positive influence, and you can't [expect] these kids are going to be talking like Jesus when they don't even know Jesus!" he says. "It's the same with church. If we're doing the job we say we want to do, and getting non believers to come to church, then we're going to have some kids coming to church smoking cigarettes and wearing Slipknot T-shirts."

Popular bands such as Skillet aren't the only ones intent on making "friends" on MySpace. When it comes to breaking a new act, building a massive network of these friends has become more important than building a strong local following. Meanwhile, the importance of radio success (not even an option for many Christian artists) is fading as streaming music, podcasts and digital downloads increase in popularity. In fact, from the comments made by several major-label A&R reps, more bands are being discovered online than in concert these days.

As a director of A&R for EMI Christian Music Group, Chris York signs bands and helps develop their work for release. He says of new Internet tools such as MySpace, "It's playing a huge role, and we're talking about it every day. When we're

looking at bands that we sign, it used to be about how good the band was and how good their songs were. But now it's about what kind of presence do they have on the Web, and how many plays do they have on MySpace? Do they have videos up?"

In addition to being a long-time member of alternative rock act **The Choir**, Dan Michaels heads up the marketing department for INO and S/R/E Records. He has seen this phenomenon transform his day-to-day efforts. "We encourage our artists to have constant connection with their fan base. It's not enough to release a record every 18 months to two years. We need to have bonus content, exclusive content, videos from the road. We're constantly working with artists to provide things like Sony Connect, iTunes Originals and Napster Live."

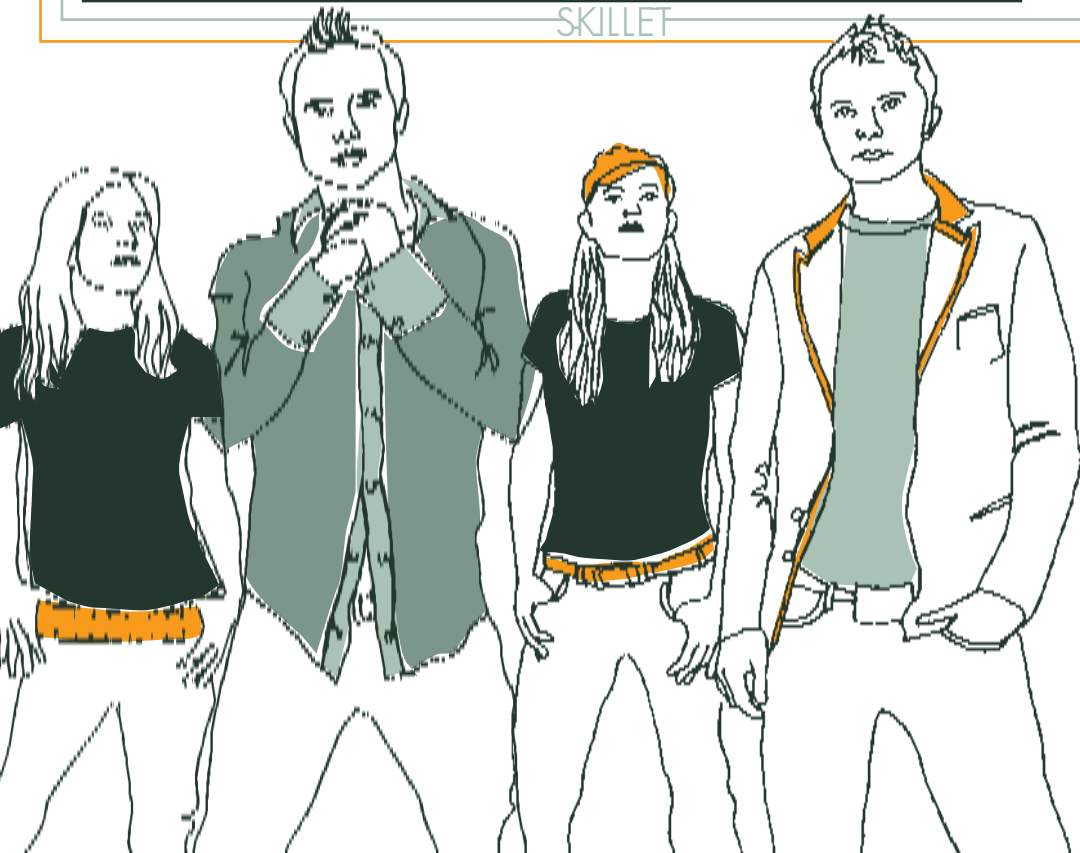
Bryan Ward is a director of artist development for EMI Christian Music Group and works with artists such as **Steven Curtis Chapman**, **Rebecca St. James**, **Bethany Dillon**, **Shawn McDonald** and **Vicky Beeching**. He sees tools such as MySpace and YouTube as absolute essentials. "For my roster we have to rely on it," he insists. "With Shawn McDonald and Bethany Dillon, the singer/songwriter artists, they don't always get the big radio hits. They're not writing for that. They want to make great art, and if it gets on radio, great. If it doesn't, they'll find other ways. We have to use the Web and these tools as a major part of the marketing plan." Dillon, who earned some mainstream attention last year when her music was included in the film *Dreamer*, saw her Alexa Rating (a rating of the most trafficked websites in the world) jump up to 85,000 overall, higher than most general market acts and all Christian market acts, as she constantly posted new content on her

official site such as journal entries and personal videos. Her MySpace site was used to drive people to her official site.

Jamie Rowe, who was the lead singer of the rock band **Guardian** and currently maintains his own independent solo career (MySpace.com/JamieRowe), has turned his prowess for promotion into a quietly growing new business he calls Spark Media. As a sort of MySpace consultant, Rowe helps labels build and maintain pages for their bands and coaches them on how to make the most of the opportunity. (See MySpace.com/NewsboysOfficial, [/Tree63](http://MySpace.com/Tree63), [/MondayMorning](http://MySpace.com/MondayMorning) or [/DecembeRadio](http://MySpace.com/DecembeRadio) for examples of Rowe's work.) Rowe admits that corporate manipulation of the medium can obfuscate the truth behind the numbers, but insists that there is still a way to make a lasting impression by engaging this environment. "You can have a ton of friends, and it can be meaningless if all you do is send promo messages," He insists. "But if you sincerely show an interest in making a connection with your fans, I don't think there's anything better out there." Several of the bands Rowe has worked with have attracted tens of thousands of fans and have seen success with radio singles as a result. "When Sony's only website for a new movie is a MySpace page, you know it's big," he says. "It's the Rubic's Cube of 2006."

It's a brave new world, to be sure, and it has affected nearly every aspect of the writing, recording, distribution and promotion of music. The latest "big morph" has changed the nature of making music at the DNA level, leaving almost no trace of the old regime behind. Christian artists are taking full advantage of these tools—this new paradigm—to deepen the connection they have with their fans and to expand their reach to a new musical audience not limited or constrained by the infamous Christian/Secular divide.

SKILLET



BACKSTAGE PASS

Skillet, whose new album, *Comatose* (Lava/Atlantic/Ardent/S-R-E), touches thematically on the darker side of the new techno reality young people are growing up with, sees the potential vividly. Cooper, who admits he is the least technologically-savvy member of the band and who rarely even sends email, says, "I want the fans to feel that they have a role in what we are doing." He also appreciates how cool it can be for fans to have access to their favorite artists. "When I was a kid, if I could have talked to Petra online, I never would have done anything else!" he laughs. "I used to write to Petra and Rez Band and Barren Cross and say, 'You guys are cool, what's it like to be in a band?' Then I'd wait for months to maybe get a newsletter. Now it doesn't cost anything to send out a newsletter."

The commitment Skillet has made over the years to being accessible to its fans online, and after shows, has created a familial bond that gets stronger as time goes by. Through video blogging and journaling the band has kept fans updated on much more than concert schedules and new releases. Personal events such as marriages and the births of children are talked about alongside shows and albums. "I can't believe how much people feel a part of what we do," Cooper confesses. "I think most of that is because of making

ourselves available. I do the same thing at shows, but we just fuel it with the relationships online.”

Hand-in-hand with MySpace is the growing popularity of digitally delivered music via services such as iTunes, Napster, Burnlounge and Yahoo! Music. Such is the demand for specialty tracks that Skillet recorded five “unplugged” versions of songs from *Comatose* for use as exclusives by various Digital Service Providers (DSP’s). Skillet’s manager, Zach Kelm, is well aware of the new paradigm his band is working in. “The market has changed so much in the last five years,” he says. “This stuff has revolutionized how you can do business. Skillet’s audience is so young, they are at the forefront it.” Kelm admits, though, that the days of traditional radio and retail are not over. “You have to get to your base, and if they are living on the Internet you have to be reaching them there. We’re going to do all our traditional brick and mortar retail promotions, but we’ll also do the digital stuff with singles, exclusives, e-cards, video blogging and more.”

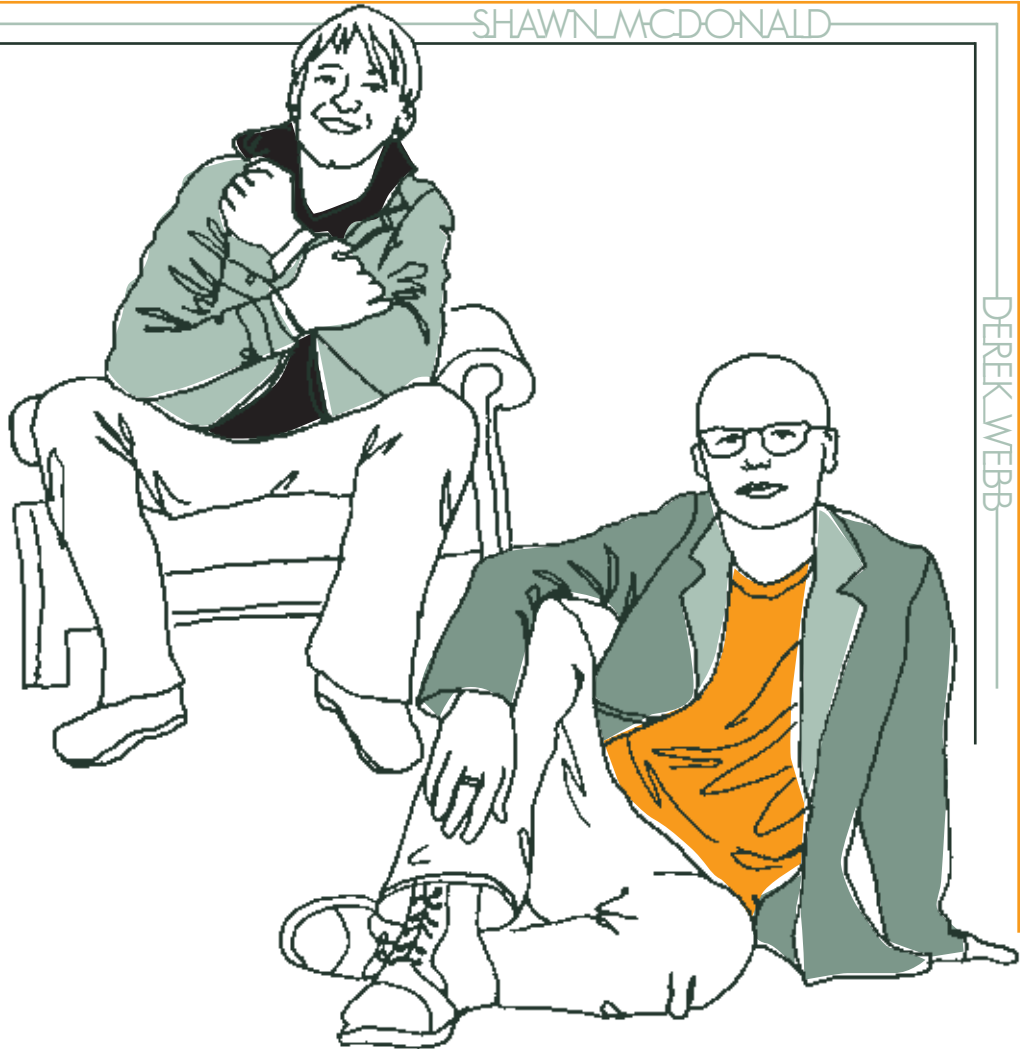
Skillet’s multi-pronged attack began with video journals from the studio that chronicled the creation of the album, sneak peak tracks on their MySpace page and even the posting of full songs. More than 150,000 people streamed the single “Rebirthing” before the album’s release on October 3. It was estimated that nearly 15 percent of Skillet’s first week sales were digital downloads; a number that is more than double the industry average. In fact, in its first week of release, *Comatose* hit the overall iTunes albums chart at No. 19, the Best-Selling Rock Album chart at No. 6; and, it was the best-selling Christian Digital album of the week. (The album also debuted at No. 55 on the *Billboard* Top 200 chart.)

FOCAL POINT

Singer/songwriter **Shawn McDonald** owes his career to MP3s. As an independent artist in Seattle, he used the original permutation of MP3.com to promote his music online long before MySpace was around. His efforts paid off. More than 100,000 downloads got the attention of EMI who signed him up. Since then McDonald has stayed at the front edge of the new-media revolution with blogging, creating his own videos, and, of course, mastering the science of MySpace. His most recent brainstorm, a contest for fan-made videos of his songs, generated 100 submissions and boosted his sales and concert attendance.

“The idea [for the video contest] was birthed out of the fact that we make our own videos,” McDonald explains. “We started doing these little short clips for parts of the live show. We put them up on the Web, and we had an amazing response from people watching them. Then, all of a sudden, all these fans started posting their own videos of shows or of songs. We just rolled with it and thought it would be fun to see what kind of videos people would come up with if we did a contest.” All involved were shocked by the response from the fans. “Not too many people I know even know how to make videos,” McDonald says. “It’s amazing to me that a hundred people took the time to make their own.” Examples of these homemade works can be seen at ShawnMcDonaldMusic.com.

McDonald has a new plan for engaging his fans online. “We’re working on a ‘how-to’ series,” he adds.



DEREK WEBB

“We’re going to make videos of how to play my songs and post them on the Web. We’ll interact with the kids, tell a story about why a song was written and what it’s about. Then I’ll play the song in front of them and show them the chords.” McDonald also handles all his own MySpace activity, including approving friend requests and answering particularly interesting questions.

THIS MUST AND SHALL GO FREE

Some might call him an anarchist, but **Derek Webb** is using the Internet to give away the farm. His critically acclaimed album, *Mockingbird* (INO), which has been hailed by influencers ranging from Jars of Clay and Sara Groves to authors Donald Miller (*Blue Like Jazz*) and Brian McLaren (*A New Kind of Christian*), has been offered as a free download this fall for 90 days. In this era of illegal file sharing and peer-to-peer thievery, it may seem counterintuitive for an artist, with his label’s blessing, to offer his work for free this way. But for Webb and his label, INO Records, it makes perfect sense.

“There are a certain number of people whose radar I’m on,” Webb explains. “It’s a respectable amount of people who buy my records. It’s not a ton, but it’s enough for me to make a living, and it’s very satisfying.” Webb believed, however, that there were more Christians out there who would be interested in his strain of music than could be notified by traditional Christian media such as radio and magazines. He and his label have used personal referrals to give away as many copies of *Mockingbird* as they can in a 90 day

period (at freederekwebb.com until December 1). Webb spent some serious time researching the issue of digital distribution and Internet trends and arrived at the conclusion that free digital distribution makes perfect sense if done correctly. “A lot of piracy laws have been enforced in order to protect artists like me, to make sure we get paid,” he says. “I think it’s been done with good intentions, but if the results are music fans feeling ashamed about sharing the music they love with their friends, then the whole piracy scare has done us all a great disservice.”

Perhaps the most surprising part of this story is that Webb’s record company went along with the idea. INO’s Dan Michaels saw the logic straight off. “The way INO structures deals is unique,” he admits. “And the fact that we are independently owned allows us certain freedoms or opportunities to zag when everyone else is zigging. Derek seemed like the right artist to pursue this grand experiment. One reason is that he has a strong and profound fan base that is very Internet savvy, and the other is the content of the record is something that we felt was a great message, and we were compelled to get it out.”

The experiment worked. Midway through the 90 day period, more than 65,000 people downloaded *Mockingbird* and told their friends. Audiences at Webb’s concerts more than doubled, and interest in his catalog titles continues to rise. It’s a unique experiment, and its success practically assures other artists and labels will attempt the same thing.



MERCYME

PLEASED TO MEET YOU

Michaels' expertise in new-generation marketing goes beyond Webb. Platinum-selling artist **MercyMe** was somewhat late to the MySpace ball, but wasted no time in taking full advantage of all it has to offer. INO set up MercyMe's page, but the band quickly commandeered it, making it their own. After a few months they had a couple thousand "friends" and decided that wasn't enough. Vocalist Bart Millard hatched a plan and unleashed it upon the Internet.

The offer was simple. Bart wanted the existing "friends" to tell their friends about MercyMe and to help the band build its list prior to the release of *Coming Up To Breathe*. He made them an offer they would choose not to refuse. When the band reached 10,000 fans, and then for every thousand new friends thereafter, MercyMe would write, record and post a special song exclusively for its MySpace community. The band reached its goal in no time and honored its commitment. Before long MercyMe had more than 25,000 friends and had posted 13 hilarious songs for its fans—spanning all genres from rap to heavy metal. The band had to take a break from the impromptu recording for its tour, but adapted the plan and took it up a notch. MercyMe invited fans to submit videos of themselves dancing to the song "3:42 a.m."—with the best ones played on the jumbo video screens on the band's fall tour.

MercyMe also recorded its entire *Coming Up To Breathe* album acoustically and has been doling it out gradually, and exclusively, on its podcast. Similarly inventive plans with Sara Groves, Mark Harris, Skillet and others are setting standards and turning heads.

THE DIGITAL HORIZON

In an environment where "new" becomes "established" overnight, everyone seems to look for the next big thing. Though YouTube's home-spun

video anarchy has supplanted MySpace in terms of sheer traffic, the combination of the two remains the most visited area of the Web. Add to that the growing market share for digital music (one percent of total sales three years ago and six percent now) and the new demand for video content, and the industry leaders CCM spoke to are not looking for these trends to change any time soon.

EMI Christian Music Group's Bryan Ward sees it as an essential element of customer service. "As we've seen the music industry decline over the last few years," he ponders, "I think the attitude now is that we can't force people into a corral, which might be retail, and make them buy their music there. You've got to make it available wherever they want to buy it. If that's on their mobile phone, you gotta have it there." His colleague Chris York agrees. "Sure, there will be something else down the road. We don't know if MySpace will even be around in two years. But for now, this is where the people are."

In the end, most involved boil it all down to the ubiquitous concept of *community*. "Back in the day," Jamie Rowe suggests, "it was all about the mystique, but now it's all about the accessibility. People think they know Pete Wince from Fallout Boy because of MySpace. Hawthorne Heights would not have seen that kind of success (Gold certification), but they personally spent hours each day posting messages, answering email and approving friends."

Derek Webb is even more philosophical about it all. "This is the difference between being in the record business and being in the music business," he muses. "If I'm in the record business, my full-time job is selling round pieces of plastic. That's what I do. If I am in the music business, I am connecting people with music and making my living being creative in a variety of ways. That, to me, is the way of the future." **ccm**

OUT OF THE BOX...

Many artists and record companies are trying new and innovative ways to use modern technological tools to connect with the world at large. Here are several examples...

- Since Christian hip-hop and rap has almost no radio support, the launch of **BEATMART**'s audio and video podcast series, and its constant stream of music is big news. Already past 10,000 subscribers, the Beatmart show is making an immediate difference in the faith-based hip-hop scene. (**beatmart.com**)
- Sparrow singer/songwriter **BETHANY DILLON** lets fans create the set lists for her shows by voting on her MySpace page and her official site (**bethanydillon.com**). She also unleashed her zany side; hip-hop alter-ego Li'l Raspy, via video clips. Dillon's constant updating of her site led to incredible web traffic that continues to rank among the highest artist sites on the Web.
- INO recording artist **SARA GROVES** has launched an ambitious new website called **AddToTheBeauty.com**, which is not a promotional site for her acclaimed album of the same name. Instead, Groves is creating a sort of virtual gathering place for people who want to answer God's call to make the world a better place. Blogs, reports and lists of worthy organizations needing support give the site its real sense of purpose.
- New Reunion Records singer/songwriter **BRANDON HEATH** included his actual cell phone number in the liner notes to his new album *Don't Get Comfortable* (Reunion) encouraging people to call him with feedback on it.
- **JARS OF CLAY** spent the summer building buzz for their fall release, *Good Monsters* (Essential), by releasing a series of eight 30-second video clips featuring Sesame Street type monster suits and various antics. The clips were released via the band's MySpace page, on YouTube and on their special album site, **Good-Monsters.com**.
- Guitar legend **PHIL KEAGGY** has launched his own official podcast. "The Phil Keaggy Show" features Phil in conversation, classic Keaggy tracks and some of the artist's favorite music. Keaggy's show is presented by **Podguitar.com** and is also available via iTunes and **PhilKeaggy.com**.
- **PIVITPLEX** (**pivitplex.com**) prepared for the release of its sophomore effort, *A King In A Rookery* (Selectric) by creating its own high-end e-card, offering a free and exclusive MP3, an interactive digital booklet, and creating its own reality show "Pivitplex: The Reality of a Band" that is available on JCTV and online. Though each piece of the campaign boasts major-label, big-budget production, the band is essentially independent and handled the whole project themselves.
- **SALVADOR** has partnered with The American Bible Society on a search for home spun videos promoting the importance of Bible reading. Winning entries will be released on MySpace and YouTube.
- **REBECCA ST. JAMES** has turned her MySpace page (**myspace.com/rebeccastjames**) into a sort of chapel. Bible studies, devotionals and prayer guides are enhanced with video clips hosted at YouTube and blogs. St. James sends in from around the world.



From left: Daniel Davison, Jake Schultz, Cory Brandan, Chris Day and Scottie Henry

ALBUM, REDEEMER (SOLID STATE), WAS RELEASED THE CHRISTIAN MUSIC COMMUNITY TOOK NOTICE. HOW COULD IT NOT—REDEEMER WAS ITS NO. 1-SELLING RECORD.

WHEN NORMA JEAN'S NEW

BY: DR. TONY SHORE

WHY CAN'T WE GET THE NAME?

How many names can possibly be associated with a band or a band's sound and style?

Southern hardcore giant Norma Jean has had more than its fair share. The band started out as an extremely hard and brutally intense outfit called Luti-Kriss, but then the rapper with essentially the same name became immensely popular. So it was time to come up with something new. The guys liked the idea of a hard metal band using the real name of famous screen actress Marilyn Monroe, so they settled on Norma Jean.

Since then, the band has put out three critically acclaimed metalcore albums, *Bless the Martyr and Kiss the Child*; *O God, the Aftermath*; and *Redeemer*, all of which brutally assault your senses. During this period, Norma Jean had name changes within the band line-up as well. Original vocalist Josh Scogin left in 2002 to start the Christian metalcore band The Chariot. Brad Norris then took over vocal duties on tour. In 2004, Norma Jean hit its stride, however, when Cory Brandan (Living Sacrifice, Eso-Charis) joined on as the permanent vocalist. The current line-up also includes Scottie Henry (guitar), Chris Day (guitar), Jake Schultz (bass) and Daniel Davison (drums). They all hail from the state of Georgia and share a love for Christ, diverse musical styles and, of course, barbecue.

People always want to label bands and place them in a certain niche. These guys refuse to be put in that box. But fans and critics keep trying to define their sound with more names—just do a search for “Norma Jean the band” online and you’ll find they’ve been called “metal,” “metalcore,” “hardcore,” “math metal,” “straight edge,” “brutal,” “disturbing,” “chaotic,” “dissonant” and on and on and on. Their sound has definitely changed over the past three albums, and that’s caused some heated debate among the fans and press. Responds Davison, who is also Norma Jean’s principal songwriter, “We don’t really care about all the different titles and subgenres people try to put on us. We would probably call ourselves ‘hardcore’ if pressed.”

What started out as a very free form and radically intense vibe on Norma Jean’s first record became a bit more melodic by the second. Now, on *Redeemer*, there is a much more technical and controlled sound, yet there is still a major intensity there. Says Davison, “We never want to put out the same record twice. We grow, and we write new songs; and that’s what naturally comes out. We want to try new things with every record. We want to keep it interesting and fun for us. We feel we’re still the same band with the same energy; we just like to try new things.”

Redeemer debuted at No. 38 on the *Billboard* 200 sales chart and No. 1 on SoundScan’s overall Christian album sales chart. Also, Norma Jean was one of the main bands on this year’s “Ozzfest Tour” and headlined the “Radio Rebellion Tour.” Even while gaining success and being on the road with these major general market tours and bands, Norma Jean’s members remain open about their faith. The one name or label they gladly accept is “Christian.” Davison talks about this purposeful openness saying, “We don’t hide from our

faith or who we are as Christians. We try to make it as big a part of our personal lives as much as we can, and that comes out in our music. We like to pray before we play and get together to read the Bible. Other Christian bands on the tour will come and have Bible studies with us, and we really enjoy that.” When asked if the other bands, the press or the fans ever give them a hard time about their faith, he says, “It gets brought up a lot, but it’s more of a curiosity than a slam. We haven’t tried to run from it or hide from it, and I think that, when you’re honest about it, people respect that. We welcome people who ask questions about it.”

Redeemer is receiving rave reviews from critics and fans, including fellow musician Chris Dudley, the keyboardist for Underoath. “I don’t think Norma Jean can put out a bad record,” he says, “The songs and the new album as a whole are of brutal and intelligent design.” *Redeemer* is catapulting the band to even more success. The legendary Ross Robinson (Limp Bizkit, Korn, Sepultura), one of the most acclaimed producers in hard rock, handled the production of the album. “It was a dream come true for us,” states Davison. “If there was one person we could work with and have produce an album, it was Ross. He came to see us at a show about a year ago and stuck around to talk with us afterwards for an hour or two. He really encouraged us to get back to the real reasons why we got into music and got us to think about why we’re playing the music we do. He lit our fire, got us stoked to write new songs. He told us to write this record ‘like it’s your first record and like it’s your last record. Give it all you’ve got.’”

The music on *Redeemer* speaks for itself, but the album cover is also causing a buzz. Front and center is a stark painting of a large black crow biting a girl’s head and finger. Says Davison, “We wanted something that speaks loudly. The producer, Ross Robinson, had the picture of the boy with the crow biting his ear in his house. And so we got a hold of the artist, and he had another version with the girl, which is the cover. There are some themes on the record of deception and how we can be deceived, and the paintings are symbolic of that.”

And then there are the band’s intense music video, live performances and sometimes-dark lyrics. “At face value, it may seem a bit dark. But we play the kind of music we do because it’s our way of showing our passion, and we feel it’s from God,” explains Davison. “It’s not all happy, but we try to have some hope in our albums as well. There are bad things that go on, so we don’t want to hide from that. But we try to end it on a hopeful message. We discussed lyrics with Ross, and he was very interested to know where we got the lyrics. We would talk about the songs, tell him how they related to each of us and tell him the passages that were taken from the Bible...like Jesus said this or that, and that’s what inspires our lyrics. He was blown away by that.”

That integrity seems to be what the members of Norma Jean are all about, sharing their faith and their passion through this intense art form. Davison sums it up well, saying, “The one name we won’t back down from is ‘Christ.’” **ccm**

IT'S BEGINNING TO SOUND A LOT LIKE THIRD DAY

Once again, the fans have spoken. And, once again, this band responds.

BY: MIKE PARKER



From left: Tai Anderson, Mark Lee, Mac Powell, David Carr and Brad Avery

“Every recording artist has to make a Christmas record,” Gary Chapman once said. “It’s the law.”

Whether Third Day would have ever been prosecuted for failure to comply is now a moot point. *Christmas Offerings* (Essential), the third installment of the Atlanta-based band’s wildly popular “Offerings” series, more than satisfies the requirement. But while all the members confess to being huge fans of the music of the season, according to front man Mac Powell, a Christmas album was not even on their radar until recently.

“We never put a lot of thought into doing a Christmas album,” he explains. “In the first place, we’re a rock band. We didn’t know what kind of Christmas record we could make or whether it would be any good. In the second place, it wasn’t by any means a record we had to do. It was certainly not a record that helps us contractually, so when you look at it from a business perspective it probably is not even a wise thing to do. But over the past couple of years we’ve had so many friends and fans ask us to do it, and since we like to provide our fans with what they want, we said, ‘OK, let’s take a shot at it.’”

Guitarist Mark Lee was equally bemused and enthusiastic about the resulting project. “A couple of years ago, if someone had told me we would be doing a Christmas album, I would have been surprised,” he admits. “Now I realize it was just a natural extension of the ‘Offerings’ idea. We did the original ‘Offerings’ project because so many of our fans asked for a live worship album. It wasn’t something we planned; it was more of a response. That’s really what *Christmas Offerings* is—a response. It is about giving back to our fans and giving back to God.”

Once the decision was made to record a Christmas album, the question that haunted everyone’s mind was, “What is a Third Day Christmas album supposed to sound like?” Unlike covering an old radio hit, where listeners expect a fresh interpretation, Christmas music aficionados tend to be very possessive of their favorite carols, Powell notes, and don’t take kindly to folks who mess with them. “When it comes to Christmas, people want to hear songs that they know and like, and they want to hear them in ways that they are familiar with,” he says. “I’m the same. When I listen to Christmas music, I want to hear the melodies of the songs I grew up with. I don’t want a big departure from that.”

When the band entered the studio, the general consensus was that the project would assume a mellow, stripped down, acoustic feel. But joyous carols such as “Angels We Have Heard On High” and “The First Noel” cried out for a more celebratory treatment. Before long it was evident Third Day’s patented brand of southern-fried rock & roll would not be denied. Ultimately, Lee confesses, they ended up with an album of Christmas music that sounds like Third Day.

“I think we found a great balance,” adds Powell. “We wrote four new songs for the project, but it is mostly traditional music; songs that people know with melodies they can sing along with. Musically I think we bring a breath of fresh air to the songs.”

“It’s a Third Day kind of thing,” Lee grins. “I think we’ve got a pretty good album on our hands.”

In keeping with the “Offerings” paradigm, *Christmas Offerings* is strictly a worship album. You won’t find any “Jingle Bells” or “Chestnuts Roasting On An Open Fire”—not that the band has anything against such songs of the season. “I love those songs,” Powell says. “But as trite as it sounds, Jesus really is the reason for the season. We all have families now, and there are 14 Third Day babies. I’ve got three kids of my own, and when you have children, it makes Christmas even more special. We have an obligation to teach them about the true reason we are celebrating Christmas. It is a time of celebration, but it is also an opportunity to teach our kids about not only receiving but about giving.”

“There are definitely worship elements there,” Lee concurs. “It is a response to all the blessings He has given us. Especially at Christmas time, you think about giving—giving gifts and giving of yourself. We think the giving

of God’s Son at Christmas was the greatest gift, and we wanted to make an album that tied all those things together.”

While the guys of Third Day are adamant that *Christmas Offerings* is both a gift and a response to their fans, they are not oblivious to the fact that, at this time of year, the mainstream marketplace, for all its emphasis on the commercial side of the season, is remarkably open to “Christian” Christmas music. The airwaves are filled with the gospel message being proclaimed from some pretty unlikely sources. Consider Barbra Streisand singing “Ave Maria” or Neil Diamond crooning “O Holy Night.” NewSong’s “The Christmas Shoes” captured mainstream radio a few years back, creating not only a megahit for that band, but spawning a pair of best-selling books by novelist Donna Vanliere and two highly rated TV movies.

Of the four original tunes on the album, Powell’s “Born in Bethlehem” was tapped as the radio single. Whether it captures the mainstream’s imagination the way “Christmas Shoes” did remains to be seen. “I wanted to write a Christmas song that was also a worship song,” Powell explains, “that focused not just on the one day of His birth, but on His life and resurrection. I know that is a different holiday, but if it wasn’t for the resurrection, there wouldn’t be much reason to celebrate His birth.”

“We’ve tossed around some ideas of how we could get this music out to mainstream radio programmers,” Powell acknowledged. “But that’s really a record company decision. Mainly, we are doing some of the Christmas songs on our current tour, just to tell people about the album.”

“THIRD DAY was responsible for Christian labels embracing bands again. I love the way they love people. I think that is the reason God has used them like He has. When I think of a front man for a band, MAC POWELL has got to be in the Top 5. When he walks onto the stage, he just brings you with him. I could learn from him for days.”—Mike Weaver of Big Daddy Weave

Even as the two-time GRAMMY® Award-winning band winds down the fall leg of its hugely successful “*Wherever You Are Tour*,” Third Day’s thoughts are turning with eager anticipation toward next year. There is a certain sly mischief in the band members’ voices when they declare they are not at liberty to divulge too much information.

“Let me just say we are going to have a celebration of the years we have been together,” Powell confides. “Next year is really about reminding people of the music we have made in the past.”

“We want to make it a year long celebration of Third Day,” Lee adds. “We’re talking about maybe doing a...well, you’ll just have to wait for the official announcement. But I think it is going to be a cool thing.” **ccm**

FACING THE GIANTS

Facing the Giants, the little independent film that was made by a volunteer crew for \$100,000 and has since grossed more than \$2 million at the box office, owes much of its success to its background music, including a couple of songs by Third Day.

Sherwood Pictures approached Provident Music Group for permission to use a Third Day song, which led to a joint venture between Provident and Sony to distribute the film through Samuel Goldwyn Pictures.

“I grew up with the guys who made the movie,” Third Day’s Mac Powell says. “We went to church together, for a number of years. Stephen [Kendrick] and I used to be in a prayer group together, and I did a lot of growing, spiritually, with Stephen in that prayer group. Now to see them be able to do this, and for us to be a small part of it, is just an honor. That scene where he makes the guy carry his buddy on his back—man that was powerful.” **M.P.**



LIFE AND LOVE AND WHY

CHALK UP ONE MORE FOR BEING “CHRISTIAN BY FAITH, NOT MUSICAL GENRE.”



File Under:
Melodic Rock

Grade: B+

SWITCHFOOT

Oh! Gravity.
Columbia/Sparrow

MORE THAN FINE

Mama always said, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” On *Oh! Gravity.*, Switchfoot’s sixth studio release (third for mainstream label Columbia), the band doesn’t waste time reinventing the wheel. Why mess with a winning formula and music that sounds this fun to play?

Jon Foreman & Co. have won hearts both in and beyond the Christian audience with bold, melodic rock and smart, culturally-adept lyricism that addresses the vacuous nature of modern existence without getting all preacherly up in our faces on *The Beautiful Letdown* ('03) and *Nothing Is Sound* ('05). Like the best bands of this genre—think dada, Third Eye Blind and, obviously, U2—Switchfoot digs a little deeper, rocks a little harder and reaches up for the next rung of the ladder only to find a fresh handle for familiar themes.

These San Diego-based rockers broke out on the pop charts telling us that we were “Meant to Live” for so much more. They wanted to “Dare You to Move” because salvation is here. While those lyrics may have been too subtle for some weaned on a steady diet of modern worship, it was clear to most that Switchfoot was seeking to address the existential longings of a generation disappointed with pleasure-driven materialism and consumer-focused expressions of pseudo-individuality.

Throughout *Oh! Gravity.*, crunchy guitar riffs set the tone, while Jon Foreman’s voice proves up to the challenge of forging memorable hooks that don’t melt on contact. Catchy yet durable, Switchfoot manages that delicate balance of rocking out without losing the songs in the process.

But the issues and insights haven’t changed. In a country where “*success is equated with excess.*,” the band affirms “*that ain’t my American dream.*” Failed by the stuff we buy, the title track asks, “*Why can’t we seem to hold it together?*” Left to our own devices, we’re merely “Amateur Lovers” with “Dirty Second Hands” who “*need love like drugs.*” But, like the failed stories alluded to in “Faust, Midas, and Myself,” with its moving use of orchestral strings, we sell out the things that give life purpose and meaning for our “*pick of pretty things.*”

Faced with the emptiness of our choices, we learn that “*life begins at the intersection,*” when the protagonist cries out for a chance at real meaning: “*Before I die, I want to burn out bright.*” That creates the possibility of an “Awakening,” where Foreman sings, “*I want to know my heart is beating.*”

Crisp and compelling, Switchfoot hasn’t wandered from the path that brought it this far, but the band is not merely going through the motions either. No reinvention was necessary. So, this time, they crank the wheel up, suggest modifications and adjustments and, then, take it off-road, freewheeling on unsullied hills and vales. Reliability is not to be mistaken for predictability, and this sixth expression celebrates the vitality in the form, the fun that thrives in the functioning of this great little rock & roll band.

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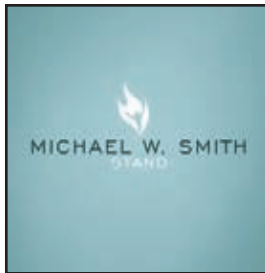
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MICHAEL W. SMITH

Stand
Reunion

File Under: Pop Grade: A

HIS BEST ALBUM IN YEARS!

Renaissance man Michael W. Smith, whose accomplishments include no less than a dozen books, more than two dozen CDs and DVDs, over three dozen GMA Music Awards, multiple GRAMMY® Awards, a starring role in a major motion picture and more No. 1 radio hits than you could count even if you took your shoes off, not to mention his leadership role at Rocketown Records or his philanthropic work with DATA and Compassion International, has just delivered his most satisfying album since 1990's *Go West Young Man*.

Stand marks Smith as something of a cross between Sting and Bono. But where those artists' recent projects might celebrate a certain enlightened spirituality, with *Stand*, Smith points his pen squarely at the core of Christianity. This is an album that explores the basic tenets of the faith with childlike simplicity; but, like the parables of Christ, there are plenty of layers in this music that will satisfy diggers who relish exploring beneath the surface to find nuggets of truth.

While Smith has long been known as something of a perfectionist in the industry, he has never been a prima donna, frequently turning to friends and colleagues for songs. But *Stand* may be the most collaborative project of his career. On the poignant, melancholy, piano ballad "How to Say Goodbye," he shares co-writing credit with superstar Amy Grant. Delirious front man Martin Smith's influence on the humble worship song "Grace" is more than evident. He even covers the classic Keith Green tune "Oh Lord, You're Beautiful" in a gorgeously orchestrated version that, at two and a half minutes long, is two minutes too short. Most prominent are the contributions by 18-year-old rising star Leeland Mooring, whose name is on more than half the songs on *Stand*.

Stand ranges from pure pop radio candy to cinematic film score-like arrangements. Filled with masterful, Jim Brickman-esque piano interpretations and nuanced Sting-like vocal turns, Smith successfully skirts the border between



MICHAEL W. SMITH

the worship and pop genres. The result is an album that might best be described simply as modern Christian music.

MIKE PARKER



GRITS
Redemption
Gotee

File Under: Hip-Hop Grade: A-

THE "TENNESSEE BWOYS" DELIVER

This duo's songs have been in movies (*The Fast and the Furious 3*, *Big Momma's House*) and on television (MTV, BET), but Coffee and Bonafide are ready for more. With *Redemption*, they are closing the Gotee Records chapter of their career and turning the page. Facing a new chapter ripe with general market possibilities (and GRITS' own record label), they offer up their most subversive project as a swan song and a sign of things to come.

Redemption eases the frenetic pace of the sprawling double disc set *Dichotomy A and B* as GRITS comes of age. Much of this album, musically, falls somewhere between Lil John's ubiquitous crunk beats and Jazzy Pha's legendary gangsta club beats. What really separates GRITS from its multi-platinum contemporaries are the lyrics. Coffee and Bonafide are fearless lyricists—fear-

MICHELLE TUMES



The unique and ethereal Michelle Tumes is back with her fourth studio album. This self-titled project returns strongly to Michelle's signature sound. Fans of Tumes' debut album *Listen* will resonate deeply with this very emotional album.



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less about their faith, fearless about truth-telling; but each MC puts his distinctive stamp on every rhyme. Bonafide raises his game, coolly dropping wisdom in nearly every verse, while Coffee has taken his spoken word-style lyricism to a new depth. And, like the MCs, the tone of this project—with beats by little known but capable producers—is as distinctive as night and day.

"Holla @ Ya" is like a smooth, sweet chocolate, but it also brings a very pointed message of encouragement to women. The bassy grind of "Heyyy" percolates like it was custom made for slow cruisin' Atlanta boulevards on a hot summer night. "Not the Same" might be dismissed as light urban radio fare if not for Coffee's tongue-twisting antics. Then the sun goes down again, and the boys mash on a dark, dirty south club beat with "Tight Wit These." The slow marching band horns on this amazing track could probably hypnotize somebody's grandmother onto a dance floor.

Switching styles again, "Ambitions" is an everyman anthem, reflecting GRITS' own prayers for wisdom as the duo heads into a new future. Cameos are few on *Redemption*, but they are well placed, with folks such as Pigeon John and re-energized underground veteran Can-I-Bus. Marred by only one near misfire, the '80s throwback "Right Back," *Redemption* is a sparkling reflection of a mature group that seems to have outgrown the Christian music scene and is completely ready to surpass the best general market hip-hop has to offer.

ANTHONY BARR-JEFFREY



File Under:
Worship/Pop

Grade: **B+**

MATT REDMAN

*Beautiful
News*
sixsteps

AN INTRODUCTION TO NEW CLASSICS

Great artists surface from the depths of great songs. Take Matt Redman, for instance. Great songs have been and continue to be the foundation of his career. With the release of *Beautiful News*, Redman's sixth project, he seeks to continue in the tradition of crafting self-described "facedown" worship songs that serve to inspire, encourage and uplift, just as with past efforts such as "Heart of Worship," "Better Is One Day" and "Blessed Be Your Name."

Filled with fantastic new additions to the contemporary worship movement, the

debut single, "You Never Let Go," and the delightful "All Over the World" are shining examples of what can be found on this album—songs of truth about God's faithfulness and grace, memorable choruses and swelling anthems of praise. At the core of Redman's talent is his ability to pen heart-penetrating lyrics, as evidenced in "A Greater Song": "Who could imagine a symphony grand enough to tell of Your glory?...I see the heavens proclaiming You day after day/And I know in my heart that there must be a way to sing a greater song."

From the album's first notes, it's apparent why Redman is right at home with the sixsteps family. His songs often evoke the Brit-rock sounds of Delirious one minute and the worshipful intonations of fellow label-mates Chris Tomlin and Charlie Hall the next. His Brit roots soar on the U2-esque "Take It to the Streets," with background vocals courtesy of Delirious' Martin Smith and Josiah Bell. And, just when you think you've figured out his artistic niche, a unique intro to "Fearfully and Wonderfully Made" features the heartbeat of a 16-week-old baby in the womb making the words richer as Redman gently sings, "So fearfully and wonderfully made/How could they say there is no God?" The song's predecessor, "Thank You for Healing Me," is an immediate highlight with its pleasant mid-tempo beat and stirring words of gratitude.

Finally, on an album full of worshipful moments, the album closer, "If You Know," serves as one of the most reverent tracks thanks to simple, poignant lyrics. However, the reverence is cut short with a reprise of the title track. Although innovative in its sound, it would have been better left untouched, leaving listeners with the essence of "if you know you're loved by the King, then live for Him."

LINDSAY WILLIAMS



File Under:
Hard Music

Grade: **A**

DISCIPLE

*Scars
Remain*
S/R/E

THE SLEDGEHAMMER FALLS

Life is hard—but there is grace. However, as Disciple reminds us on its latest hard rock opus, there are consequences to the choices we make—*Scars Remain*.

With its latest album, the hard rock band from Knoxville, Tenn., brings to bear

14 years of rock & roll matched with seasoned harmonies and heavy duty lyrics of faith and victory in a dark world. From a whisper to a scream, vocalist Kevin Young reminds listeners that the world may batter us and sin may threaten to eat away at us, but there is victory in Jesus. And it is a banner that Disciple holds high.

From the “alarm” opening of “Regime Change,” before it kicks into a big rock wall of sound, it’s clear that Disciple is playing with more urgency than ever. The title track is a veritable assault on the senses, as the lyrics zero in on the struggles of surviving trauma—and the importance of looking at your scars to remember from where you’ve come. “Love Hate (On and On)” addresses the fascination culture has with the horrors that play out on the evening news—and urges the listener to focus on the good things that often slip beneath our collective radar. The timely “Game On” deals with the complicated issue of warfare for Christians.

Balancing the scales, Disciple once again proves its musical versatility several times, from the loneliness of “My Hell” to the mid-tempo rock ballad “After the World” to the sentimental “No End at All.”

In the end, Disciple does a neat trick of giving fans what they expect—and more. *Scars*

Remain is a worthy addition to the oeuvre, showing that, even after 14 years, this band is still reaching into new artistic territory.

CHRIS WELL



File Under: Alternative Rock/Modern Worship
Grade: A

DELIRIOUS

Now Is the Time: Live at Willow Creek, Chicago, U.S.A. (CD/DVD)
Furious/Sparrow

LOTS TO LIKE IN THE LIVE SETTING

No one can accuse Delirious of taking too long in between albums, since the relatively prolific group either releases a rock record, worship project or live compilation just about every year. And, while the British-based band could appear to be capitalizing on the product chain, the group generally turns out consistent collections that die-hards devour no matter what the content. The group’s latest concert CD/DVD combo, *Now Is the Time*, comes

on the heels of several others—the most recent being 2004’s Hillsong collaboration [UP] *Unified:Praise*—though the set list remains fresh, and the performance quality is again top notch.

Rather than recycling its hits over and over again, Delirious takes a cue from Dave Matthews Band by often integrating new material and rarely performed selections into each tour. This particular outing was in support of its latest studio creation, *The Mission Bell*, and features the majority of those selections, which works to the gang’s advantage considering the disc’s explosive mixture of jarring guitars, catchy choruses and congregational appeal. The track list is virtually identical on both the audio and visual installments, including lively, hypnotic versions of the old hymn turned alternative expression “Solid Rock,” the Coldplay-esque “Now Is the Time,” the grandeur of “Miracle Maker” and the barnburner “Paint the Town Red.”

While the CD is a little limited in translating the audience’s excitement to a personal stereo, the DVD more than makes up for the slack. Not only is the crowd especially energetic, but the production is top notch and could rival any major mainstream concert release. Older fans will also

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FEATURING CHRISTMAS FAVORITES

“TIS THE SEASON” AND “HARK THE HERALD ANGELS SING” PLUS NEW SONGS

appreciate a gripping rendition of “History Maker” (exclusive to the DVD), one of the show’s most moving examples of simultaneous praise and partying. All in all, *Delirious* once again steps in an inventive direction while refusing formula in one of its most worthwhile live offerings to date.

ANDY ARGYRAKIS



MICHELLE TUMES

Michelle Tumes
Levantar/Infinity

File Under:
Ambient Pop

Grade: A

THE COMEBACK OF THE YEAR

A self-titled album usually indicates an introduction to a new artist, but Michelle Tumes’ latest release is a reintroduction—a chance to become reacquainted with a voice we have loved. Michelle parted ways with Sparrow Records after three albums and has come back to the scene with this amazing piece of art, proving that her journey to rediscovering her creativity, apart from thoughts of commercial success, was well worth each path-carving step.

From the first to the last track, each song flows effortlessly to the next, preserving the ambient and ethereal mood that becomes the backdrop of the album—artfully produced by Michelle and her husband, Doug Higgins. With soaring strings and building undertones, these 11 songs come together as one powerfully enchanting statement. Tumes’ vocals seem to float above the tracks, angelic and haunting. The words she sings with stunning clarity and innocence seamlessly weave their way into the music as the perfect compliment to the artistic tapestry of sounds.

“Domine,” the first single released from the album, is both catchy and upbeat. While most of the album lends itself to a moody and melancholy tone, this song is a good addition with its tempo and moving instrumental parts. The song “Fair Weather” has a chorus that literally explodes and leaves goose bumps on your arms.

In addition to the 50-piece orchestra (conducted by Tumes herself) featured on the album, contributing musicians include drummer Vinnie Coliauta (Sting), bassist Leeland Sklar (Phil Collins), percussionist Bernie Dressel (Brian Setzer) and Venus Hum’s programming whiz Tony Miracle. Released on her own indie label, Levantar,



MICHELLE TUMES

this is by far Tumes’ best effort to date—yes, even better than *Listen* and *Center of My Universe*. So grab your favorite warm drink and a spare hour in your day and drink in this masterful music experience.

KATE McDONALD



ROBERT RANDOLPH & THE FAMILY BAND

Colorblind
Word/Curb/
Warner Bros.

File Under:
Rock/Blues/Pop

Grade: B

A THRILLER FOR ANOTHER SEASON

Robert Randolph & The Family Band started as critics’ darlings with its 2002 debut, *Live at The Wetlands*. Its swampy sound, built around Randolph’s pedal steel guitar, has evolved through its follow-up, *Unclassified*, into a progressively more accessible mix of bluesy rock and pop as its jam-band live shows earned it the opening slot for Dave Matthews Band, among others.

Matthews and violinist Leroi Moore join the crew here for “Love Is the Only Way,” and, though the collaboration seems a lukewarm one at first, several listens find it improving. Part of *Colorblind*’s accessibility enhancement is its guest list, including soulstress Leela James and guitar hero Eric Clapton.

The best cuts, though, are all Randolph and family. “Ain’t Nothing Wrong With That” and the single, “Thrill of It All,” are both top-down, rolling-down-the-highway jams. The latter sounds more than a little like dcTalk’s “Mind’s Eye.” Randolph must be quite a fan because “Deliver Me” also sports dcTalk’s influence; and he and Clapton revisit the Doobie Brothers’ “Jesus Is Just Alright,” famously covered

on *Free at Last*. What a kick to hear Eric Clapton singing the “Jesus, He’s my friend” bridge. “Angels” is a pop-meets-neo-soul-with-a-little-simmering-guitar-thrown-in slow burner—a charming, VH1-ready gem. And the Family goes full-on gospel with “Blessed.”

If many of those titles sound rather familiar, they are; you’d struggle to find much originality in the lyrics department. “Thankful N’ Thoughtful” and “Homecoming” quickly grow monotonous, though the former does allow Randolph a lengthy guitar jam. But, on balance, this is an energetic, fun record—perhaps better suited to a summer road trip than for fall. It seems geared to boosting the band’s profile and keeping the accolades rolling in.

BEAU BLACK



INHALE EXHALE

The Lost, the Sick, the Sacred
Solid State

File Under:
Eclectic Hard Music

Grade: A-

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU HEARD A DEBUT THIS GOOD?

These Canton, Ohio, natives boldly announce their presence on the modern hard music scene with one of the strongest debut releases in years. *The Lost, the Sick, the Sacred* combines blistering guitars, strong melodic sensibilities, guttural screams and progressive arrangements in a formula that references a wide range of modern and classic influences and, yet, sounds completely original unto itself.

With veteran rock producer Travis Wyrick (Pillar, P.O.D.) at the helm and a

collection of 10 solid songs, Inhale Exhale is a study in influences. From Southern rock to speed metal, arena rock to screamo, it's all in the soup. Heavy-hitting diversity is the order of the day. Rhythmic breakbeats and dynamic extremes belie some prog rock elements, while the band's attention to nuance and overall song structures hail acts such as Thrice and Dead Poetic. Screaming guitar assaults ride the third rail between classic and modern metal, with plenty of squealing pinch harmonics and lightning fast riffage as well as old-school arpeggios and modern-day plods.

Easily toggling back and forth from anthemic singing to full throttle screams, there's even a sense of melody in the most obliterated vocal shreds on the disc.

Vocalist Ryland Raus' mostly discernable vocals deliver lyrics as passionate about the hard truths of life and the ultimate answer found only in God as they are about pinning the musical needle at 11. Thematically divided between the three words of the title, *The Lost, the Sick, the Sacred* confidently picks at the scabs of a wounded culture with some actual medicine to offer.

JOHN J. THOMPSON



FERNANDO ORTEGA
The Shadow of Your Wings: Hymns and Sacred Songs
 Curb

File Under: Thoughtful Worship
Grade: A

WITH LYRICS LIKE THESE, WHO NEEDS A DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET?

Fernando Ortega is a poetic conversationalist. His songs are known to be full of wonder about everyday life and are oftentimes dressed in various sounds of folk, country, classical or pop. His new release, *The Shadow of Your Wings: Hymns and Sacred Songs*, however, shows a new sense of wonder for the world about him, one tied strongly to prayerful study of the Bible and devotion.

Responding to the barrage of noise and life around him, Ortega dives into scripture and liturgy to grieve the loss of loved ones and to find a fresh perspective on worship. He then sets these Bible texts and inspirations to

music and writes new sacred songs with a very classical feel, using mostly voice and piano, as on the stirring "Grace and Peace" and "All Flesh Is Like the Grass." The hymns (some ever so slightly rearranged) are part of Ortega's journey, and he uses them methodically without sounding contrived. The new and the old become seamless and create what feels like a shadow of protection.

Produced and mixed by Ortega and GRAMMY®-winning engineer Gary Paczosa (Alan Jackson, Dixie Chicks), the project is further enhanced with numerous special musical guests including Alison Krauss and Susan Ashton and the harmonies of Vince Gill and Dan Tyminski (Union Station). GRAMMY® winners Turtle Island String Quartet give life to arrangements by longtime collaborator John Schreiner on numerous tracks.

Devotion to God is worship of God, and, in a subdued, meditative manner, Ortega creates the right atmosphere in which the listener can reflect on God and commune with God.

JACKIE A. CHAPMAN

SCHOOL OF: COMPUTER ANIMATION > DIGITAL ARTS & DESIGN > ENTERTAINMENT BUSINESS > FILM > GAME DEVELOPMENT > RECORDING ARTS > SHOW PRODUCTION & TOURING

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– *Rolling Stone Magazine*
 August 11, 2005



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MATT WERTZ

Everything in Between
Handwritten

File Under:
Pop

Grade: **A-**

SOON TO BE A HOUSEHOLD NAME?

Proving that a record deal isn't always a prerequisite for success in the music biz, wannabe-shoe-designer-turned-singer/songwriter Matt Wertz has gained a fiercely loyal following as an indie artist. Need proof? Just check out his popular MySpace page (myspace.com/mattwertz).

Now, if that buzz wasn't already enough to secure his place as an artist on the rise, well, an opening slot on Jars of Clay's "Good Monsters Tour," not to mention a well-crafted sophomore release produced by Ed Cash (Chris Tomlin, Kathy Mattea), shouldn't hurt his efforts, either.

With the sensitive, heart-on-his-sleeve style that's served the likes of John Mayer, Gavin DeGraw and Bebo Norman so well in

the past, Wertz weaves together 10 short but memorable tales of love, loss and heartbreak on *Everything in Between*. But, instead of sticking with the tried-but-true, guy-with-a-guitar soundtrack that's been utilized countless times, Wertz integrates a little funk and jazz into the mix, which inevitably ups the ante musically.

In fact, on the catchy opener, "The Way I Feel," Wertz even invites mainstream crooner Marc Broussard along for the ride, which adds additional punch to the song's down-home flavor. Then, for the more folksy strains of "Carolina," Wertz teams up with his roommate and fellow artist Brandon Heath on what's ultimately another stand-out cut.

And, while those searching for more blatant spirituality (as on Heath's debut, *Don't Get Comfortable*) won't necessarily find that as much here in Wertz's lyrics, the project takes a refreshing, unforced turn in that direction with "I Will Not Take My Love Away," a confessional, folk laden account of God's faithfulness that'll certainly resonate with new and old fans alike.

CHRISTA A. BANISTER



MATT WERTZ

new releases

DECEMBER 5

Various

The Nativity Story: Original Score
(Word/Curb/WB)

DECEMBER 12

Kutless

Live in Portland CD/DVD (BEC)

DECEMBER 26

Steven Curtis Chapman

Now & Then (Sparrow)

dcTalk

Jesus Freak (Special Edition)
(Forefront/EMI)

New Life Worship

My Savior Lives (Integrity)

Passion Band

Best of Passion (So Far) (sixsteps)

Matt Redman

Beautiful News (sixsteps)

Soul P.

The Premiere (Beatmart)

Switchfoot

Oh! Gravity. (Columbia/Sparrow)

Various

Cover the Earth (Integrity)

Various

WOW Next 2007 (EMI)

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WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA



The New Sounds of Christmas

If you're a fan of Christmas albums, then this is your year. A slew of artists and their record labels are going beyond the call of duty to bring you what you love best. From popular faves such as HAWK NELSON and MARY MARY to HILLSONG and the brilliant SUFJAN STEVENS, Christmas never sounded like this before...



TODD AGNEW
Do You See What I See?
Ardent
Cool Factor: ❄️❄️❄️

A UNIQUE, MUSICAL RETELLING OF THE CHRISTMAS STORY

Holiday Spirit: *The Preacher's Wife* soundtrack meets *Grace Like Rain*
Star Song: "Do You Hear What I Hear?"—Todd's version sets the tone for "hearing" the unique perspectives of the players in the nativity.

Classic Kringle to New Jingle Ratio: 2:9
Stocking Stuffer: A unique blend of artists collaborate on this album, each telling a segment of the story of Christ's birth from various characters' viewpoints.

LINDSAY WILLIAMS



MURIEL ANDERSON
Harp Guitar Christmas
Independent
Cool Factor: ❄️❄️❄️❄️

AN AMAZING COLLECTION OF FINGERSTYLE CLASSICAL AND NEO-CLASSICAL GUITAR PERFORMANCES

Holiday Spirit: Features traditional classical guitar and a rare nylon-string "Harp Guitar"

Star Song: "El Noy de la Mare"—This original is an excellent example of Anderson's unique style and supreme talent.

Classic Kringle to New Jingle: 11:1
Stocking Stuffer: Muriel Anderson, who has studied under the legendary Christopher Parkening and performed with greats such as Stanley Jordan and Duane Eddy, was the first woman to win the National Fingerpicking Guitar Championship. She's even had her music taken to

space by U.S. astronauts aboard the space shuttle. **JOHN J. THOMPSON**



ANNIE MOSES BAND
House of Bread
Man Alive
Cool Factor: ❄️❄️❄️❄️

BEAUTIFUL ARRANGEMENTS AND ANGELIC VOCALS MAKE THIS RECORD WORTH PICKING UP, BUT ONLY A FEW TRACKS VARY STYLISTICALLY.

Holiday Spirit: String-driven instrumental with classically trained vocals

Star Song: If the tight vocal arrangements on "Mary Had a Baby" don't give you goose bumps, you aren't breathing!

Classic Kringle to New Jingle: 4:6
Stocking Stuffer: This family ensemble boasts several members who studied music at Julliard!

KATE McDONALD



MOYA BRENNAN
An Irish Christmas
Sparrow/EMI
Cool Factor: ❄️❄️❄️❄️❄️

MOVE OVER ENYA! BIG SIS MOYA IS THE ORIGINAL!

Holiday Spirit: Beautiful arrangements and flowing orchestrations with a Celtic undertone

Star Song: "In the Bleak Midwinter"—Simply a gorgeous, stunning recording of this classic (with "What Child Is This?" coming in a close 2nd)

Classic Kringle to New Jingle: 12:0
Stocking Stuffer: Every cut has the ability to make you stop in your tracks (CD tracks, that is). This Christmas album will, no doubt, become a classic in the years to come.

KRISTI HENSON



WAYBURN DEAN
Peace Child
Wayjade Music/EMG
Cool Factor: ❄️❄️❄️❄️

THIS ALBUM HAS GREAT GROOVES AND SOULFUL VOCALS THAT MAKE EVEN FAMILIAR TUNES TOE-TAPPING FRESH.

Holiday Spirit: Jazz/Soul

Star Song: You'll find yourself coming back again and again to listen to "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas."

Classic Kringle to New Jingle Ratio: 9:1
Stocking Stuffer: You might not recognize the name, but Wayburn was a member of Acappella!

K.M.



FIRST CALL
Christmas Landscapes: Evenings in December
Word/Curb/WBR
Cool Factor: ❄️❄️❄️

A NICE COLLECTION OF A CAPPELLA PERFORMANCES

Holiday Spirit: Classic arrangements, ringing with First Call harmonies

Star Song: "Caroling, Caroling"—Gets you in the spirit to decorate, shop and sing along

Classic Kringle to New Jingle: 10:2
Stocking Stuffer: A compilation of songs from First Call's *Evening in December*, Vols. 1 & 2

JACKIE A. CHAPMAN



GO FISH
Snow
GFK/Word
Cool Factor: ❄️❄️❄️

SPREADING CHRISTMAS CHEER IN A SIMPLE, DIRECT WAY

Holiday Spirit: Go Fish a cappella spiced up for the whole family

Star Song: "Away in a Manger/Beautiful Savior"—The sweet a cappella carol moves gracefully into a well-matched hymn.

Classic Kringle to New Jingle: 6:4

Stocking Stuffer: Comedian Brad Stine makes an appearance on "Christmas With a Capital C."

J.A.C.



HAWK NELSON
Gloria EP
BEC
Cool Factor: ❄️❄️❄️❄️

THE COOL WORSHIP VIBE OF THE ORIGINAL TUNE "ALLELUIA" IS SOMEWHAT OFFSET BY THE KINDA CREEPY TWIST OF THE CLASSIC SACRED MASTERPIECE "GLORIA (IN EXCELSIS DEO)" INTO A SONG ABOUT A GIRL.

Holiday Spirit: This is classic Hawk Nelson power pop with no discernable trace of punk at all, but excellent production and great arrangements.

Star Song: "Alleluia"—An original track that is truly worshipful and fun

Classic Kringle to New Jingle: 1:2 (Though "Gloria" borrows the melody of the hymn in its chorus, it is definitely a new song. The only traditional song, "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day," follows the original hymn lyrics but adds a chorus part and tweaks the melody to fit into the modern rock format.)

Stocking Stuffer: This EP is a three-song disc that will be available free with a purchase at select retailers. **J.J.T.**



HILLSONG
Celebrate Christmas
Hillsong/Integrity
Cool Factor: ★★★★★

AS COLORFUL AS THE ORNAMENTS ON A TREE, DARLENE ZSCHECH AND THE HILLSONG TEAM HAVE NEVER SOUNDED THIS ECLECTIC.

Holiday Spirit: Worshipful Pop/Rock/Big Band

Star Song: "O Come, O Come Emmanuel"—An instrumental that's simply stunning

Classic Kringle to New Jingle: 7:5

Stocking Stuffer: Perfect for 'round-the-fire caroling, the CD is enhanced with lead sheets to all the songs.

ANDREE FARIAS



ISRAEL & NEW BREED
A Timeless Christmas
Integrity
Cool Factor: ★★★★★

PUTS THE CHRIST BACK IN CHRISTMAS WITH BREATHTAKING ARRANGEMENTS AND PASSION

Holiday Spirit: Worshipful R&B/Gospel/Jazz/Fusion

Star Song: "O Come"—Enough R&B and gospel fire to light up the fireplace

Classic Kringle to New Jingle: 9:6

Stocking Stuffer: Israel's son, Israel Duncan, shines in the all-too-cute "Sonny Boy Christmas."
A.F.



MARY MARY
A Mary Mary Christmas
Integrity Gospel/Columbia
Cool Factor: ★★★★★

ONLY MARY MARY CAN MAKE THE TRANSITION FROM ROMPING PARTY MUSIC TO SOUL STIRRING CHURCH CLASSICS AS FLUIDLY AS THIS.

Holiday Spirit: Eclectic urban contemporary—from classic soul to party funk to calypso to modern R&B

to classic gospel, this disc has everything fans have come to love about Mary Mary with a little extra in the toe of the stocking.

Star Song: "Tis the Season" references elements of The Jackson 5, Parliament, James Brown and Aretha Franklin's more zany moments and comes out with a three minute jam so hard you can practically hear the tree fall over from all the dancing.

Classic Kringle to New Jingle: 4:7

Stocking Stuffer: If the opening track "Tis the Season," one of the coolest old-school funk/R&B jams of the last 20 years, isn't playing at your Christmas party this year, your party is probably lame. **J.J.T.**



KEVIN MAX
Holy Night
Northern
Cool Factor: ★★★★★

IF YOU'RE BORED WITH BING, KEVIN'S FAMOUS VIBRATO WILL DEFINITELY MAKE YOUR CHRISTMAS MERRY.

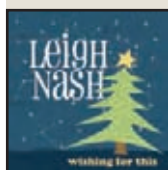
Holiday Spirit: Surprisingly traditional for the *avant-garde* rocker

Star Song: "O Holy Night"—Cool xylophone plus angelic singing equals pure delight.

Classic Kringle to New Jingle: 13:0

Stocking Stuffer: To reflect further on the true meaning of Christmas, Max included verses not typically included in hymns such as "Hark the Herald Angels Sing."

CHRISTA A. BANISTER



LEIGH NASH
Wishing for This EP
iTunes
Cool Factor: ★★★★★

PERFECT FOR HOLIDAY MOMENTS BY A CRACKLING FIRE. IF ONLY IT HAD BEEN A FULL-LENGTH COLLECTION...

Holiday Spirit: Alt-pop Americana with a smoldering jazz twist

Star Song: The Kate York-penned "Eternal Gifts"—A slow, thoughtful ballad which does a nifty job of balancing what we want for Christmas with what we need.

Classic Kringle to New Jingle: 5:2

Stocking Stuffer: The digital EP (for download only) is probably the only collection this season with such a range—spanning from the traditional "O Holy Night" to Dolly Parton's "Hard Candy Christmas" to Wham's "Last Christmas." And it works!
CHRIS WELL



NEWSONG
The Christmas Hope
Integrity
Cool Factor: ★★★★★

BAND KNOWS ITS AC AUDIENCE AND HITS THE BULLS-EYE, BUT OVER-PRODUCED IN SPOTS. LOVE THE UNEXPECTED ADDITION OF "WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD."

Holiday Spirit: Think "sentimental sleigh ride."

Star Song: "Southbound Flight (Rudolph Version)" bonus track—Save the big production and give me a whole album like this cut!

Classic Kringle to New Jingle: 7:5

Stocking Stuffer: Built around the "Christmas Shoes" trilogy of songs, best-selling books and CBS television movies. Plus, Matthew West co-penned the title track.

MELISSA HAMBRICK



SANDI PATTY
The Voice of Christmas
Word/Curb/WBR
Cool Factor: ★★★★★

A COOL COLLECTION WHICH INCLUDES SEVEN TRACKS NEVER COMMERCIALY RELEASED UNTIL NOW

Holiday Spirit: Full, symphonic arrangements. Classic Sandi.

Star Song: "Ave Maria"—A melding of the Schubert and Bach/Gounod versions, easily one of the best recordings I've ever encountered

Classic Kringle to New Jingle: 9:3

Stocking Stuffer: Also features two duets with Peabo Bryson and songs from Sandi's previous releases *O Holy Night!* and *Merry Christmas With Love* **K.H.**



SUFJAN STEVENS
Songs for Christmas
Asthmatic Kitty
Cool Factor: ★★★★★

A BOX SET THAT INCLUDES ALL FIVE OF SUFJAN'S CHRISTMAS EPs (NEVER BEFORE PUBLICLY RELEASED), STICKERS, A SONGBOOK, ARTWORK, STORIES, AN ESSAY, LINER NOTES AND MORE

Holiday Spirit: Features indie/folk songs recorded with various instruments, including banjo, guitar, oboe, Casio keyboard, flute, handclaps and sleigh bells

Star Song: "That Was the Worst Christmas Ever!"—This original song is warm and intimate, reminiscent of his *Seven Swans* album, and is classic Suffjan Stevens.

Classic Kringle to New Jingle: 25:17

Stocking Stuffer: These traditional Christmas songs, hymns and original sing-alongs were recorded at home by Sufjan with his friends over the past six years; and these EPs were originally hand-assembled and sent with a Christmas card to his friends and family. Eventually, word got around to his fans about these mysterious unreleased songs (“Come On! Let’s Boogey to the Elf Dance!”), and, now, here they are for everyone to enjoy. **ANDREW SCATES**



THIRD DAY
Christmas Offerings
Essential
Cool Factor: ❄️❄️❄️

THIRD DAY MANAGES TO MIX LIVE CUTS WITH STUDIO TRACKS IN A PACKAGE THAT WON'T DISAPPOINT LONGTIME FANS.

Holiday Spirit: Hallmark Third Day, holiday style

Star Song: “Jesus, Light of the World”—Simple lyrics, beautiful vocals

Classic Kringle to New Jingle: 9:4

Stocking Stuffer: The live portion of the album was recorded with 150-plus friends in an intimate setting at Atlanta’s Nickel & Dime Studios in the heat of summer. **L. W.**



VARIOUS
Christmas Treasures: A McPherson Guitars Instrumental Collection
Autumn
Cool Factor: ❄️❄️❄️❄️

THE TRACKS ON THIS IMPECCABLY ORCHESTRATED ALBUM MAY NOT BE INNOVATIVE, BUT THEY COULD STIR UP THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT IN SCROOGE...

Holiday Spirit: Instrumental...makes you want to grab a warm drink and watch Christmas lights!

Star Song: “The Christmas Song” is a jazzy track that will be sure to have you dancing.

Classic Kringle to New Jingle: 17:0

Stocking Stuffer: This heartwarming instrumental CD features eight world-class guitarists, including Phil Keaggy, Mark Baldwin, Tom Hemby and Matt McPherson (founder and designer of McPherson Guitars). **K. M.**



VARIOUS
Joy to the World—The Ultimate Christmas Collection
INO
Cool Factor: ❄️❄️❄️

SOLID, STANDARD CHRISTIAN POP VERSIONS OF CLASSICS AND RECENT ORIGINALS FROM

MERCYME, SARA GROVES, 4HIM, PHILIPS, CRAIG & DEAN, MARK HARRIS AND OTHERS IN THE INO STABLE WILL THRILL CHRISTIAN AC RADIO FANS.

Holiday Spirit: It’s a compilation that ranges from ballads to modern rock, but mostly hangs out in the middle of the road. (Read: Adult Pop)

Star Song: Phil Wickham’s fascinating emo/indie rock original, “Messiah (Christmas Version),” and Derek Webb’s spartan treatment of the classic “Lo How a Rose E’re Blooming” lock reindeer horns in a holiday cage match for most interesting contribution to the disc.

Classic Kringle to New Jingle: 5:6 (and 5 of the 11 recordings were previously released)

Stocking Stuffer: The inclusion of MercyMe’s excellent “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen”—from the band’s ‘05 Christmas release—reminds us how awesome that record was. This will get a lot of play on the overhead systems in Christian bookstores this year. **J. J. T.**



VARIOUS
The Nativity Story: Sacred Songs
Word
Cool Factor: ❄️❄️❄️❄️

A FINE COLLECTION OF PREVIOUSLY RELEASED CUTS AND ONE NEW ALL-STAR TRACK

Holiday Spirit: If you’re a little bit country and a little bit AC, this is the soundtrack for your Christmas festivities.

Star Song: Amy Grant’s “Breath of Heaven (Mary’s Song)”—It’s a classic. Gotta love it!

Classic Kringle to New Jingle: 8:5

Stocking Stuffer: Don’t miss “The Virgin’s Lullaby,” a new recording featuring Natalie Grant, Point of Grace, David Phelps, Mike Weaver (Big Daddy Weave), Todd Smith and Allan Hall (Selah) and Michael Farren (Pocket Full of Rocks). **K. H.**



VARIOUS
Songs of December: The Familiar Classics
Beatmart
Cool Factor: ❄️❄️❄️

CHILL ENOUGH TO RELAX TO AFTER A HECTIC DAY OF SHOPPING

Holiday Spirit: Instrumental pop

Star Song: “What Child Is This?”—Amidst the yuletide lull, this is the song with a heartbeat.

Classic Kringle to New Jingle: 8:2

Stocking Stuffer: This is the first instrumental album from fledgling hip-hop label Beatmart. **A. F.**



VARIOUS
Unexpected Gifts
Sparrow
Cool Factor: ❄️❄️❄️❄️

A PLEASANT ASSORTMENT OF HOLIDAY FAVORITES FROM HEAVY-HITTERS SUCH AS REBECCA ST. JAMES, CHRIS TOMLIN, NICHOLE NORDEMAN, DAVID CROWDER+BAND, STEVEN CURTIS CHAPMAN AND MORE

Holiday Spirit: Shimmering, pristine pop

Star Song: “O Come, All Ye Faithful”—Starfield’s harmonies and layered vocals bring new depth to a timeless classic.

Classic Kringle to New Jingle: 12:0

Stocking Stuffer: While most of these tracks were previously released, there are two new recordings by Sanctus Real and Starfield, and Shawn McDonald’s version of “O Holy Night” is now available on CD for the first time. **L. W.**



MATTHEW WARD
Christmas With Matthew Ward
Independent
Cool Factor: ❄️❄️❄️❄️

A BEAUTIFUL BLEND OF VOCALS AND ARRANGEMENTS DO EACH SONG JUSTICE.

Holiday Spirit: Classic Christmas

Star Song: “In the Bleak Midwinter”—A less familiar but haunting and worshipful song brought to life with simple guitar

Classic Kringle to New Jingle: 10:1

Stocking Stuffer: The pioneering 2nd Chapter of Acts co-founder created this album to benefit Children’s HopeChest, an orphan relief agency. (Visit hopechest.org and matthewward.com for more info.) **M. H.**



WORSHIP JAMZ
Worship Jamz Christmas
Razor & Tie
Cool Factor: ❄️❄️

“AWAY IN A MANGER” WAS NEVER MEANT TO SOUND LIKE THIS.

Holiday Spirit: Mega-produced Disney Channel-styled Merry Christmas

Star Song: “O Little Town of Bethlehem”—Strings and a funky drum machine beat give this traditional ballad a new feel.

Classic Kringle to New Jingle: 16:0

Stocking Stuffer: Kidz Bop for Christian kids, following two praise & worship releases heavily pushed onto tween TV watchers **M. H.**



the fineprint | books

by Kristi Henson

HE LIGHTS UP OUR LIVES

Did you know that **PAT BOONE** was the original "American Idol," winning a televised amateur-hour contest in the '50s? Did you know that, during the classic rock & roll era, his record sales were second only to Elvis (and that he's now sold more than 45 million albums)? Or did you know he had 38 consecutive Top 40 hits? No? Then you may also be unaware of quite a few highlights from the life and times of this American rock star. In his new autobiography, *Pat Boone's America: A Pop Culture Journey Through the Last Five Decades* (B&H), Boone takes us on a sentimental journey, pointing out sweeping changes in American culture over the past half century while chronicling the ways in which he and Shirley (his wife of more than 50 years) stayed true to their faith and values. Even if you're not familiar with his music, you'll dig his story. Read this book...and rock on!

MY FAVORITE THINGS

Chestnuts roasting on an open fire and heartwarming stories of the glories of Christmases long, long ago... Such is the stuff of cherished holiday songs, and this year, the stories come compliments of **AMY HAMMOND HAGBERG's** *My Favorite Christmas* (Integrity House). Fondly recall your own memories as you read those shared by Steven Curtis Chapman, Natalie Grant, Bart Millard (MercyMe), former President Jimmy Carter and more. And all royalties from the sale of this book will be donated to Feed the Children (an international, non-profit relief organization). Great holiday fare!

THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE

MAX LUCADO alert! He's back with his first yuletide title in eight years. Expect more of the Lucado you know and love in *The Christmas Candle* (WestBow), a timeless story of candles, angels and miracles set in a small English village in the 18th century. Aaahh! If that's not a picture print from Courier & Ives, I don't know what is!

ENOUGH ABOUT ME, LET'S TALK ABOUT YOU

They're not yet 30 years old, but **CRAIG KIELBURGER** & **MARC KIELBURGER** are the founders and directors of Free the Children (an internationally acclaimed children's charity), and they've already won the 2006 Children's Nobel Prize, a Rhodes Scholarship and three Nobel Prize nominations. The secret to such a full life? Focusing less on oneself and more on others. In *Me to We: Finding Meaning in a Material World* (Fireside/Simon & Schuster), the Kielburgers outline their philosophy of an others-centered outlook. And did I mention that Oprah contributes to the book? Oh, yes, and all profits from the sale of the book will be donated to Free the Children. It's an extremely compelling offering on all fronts.

20/20

Having been reared in a church which considered her musical interests (rock & roll...and drums) to be "of the devil," **TARA LEIGH COBBLE** never would have guessed she'd grow up to be a full-time indie musician traveling 25 days per month on average. In *Here's to Hindsight: Letters to My Former Self* (Relevant), she examines the ways that God orchestrated the music of her life to make her the person she is today. For more info, visit taraleighcobble.com.

B(u)y the Book

Haven't finished your Christmas shopping yet? We recommend these titles...



If you haven't yet picked up a copy of **AUDIO ADRENALINE's** *Hands & Feet* (Regal) for the AudioA fan in your family, be sure to do so. The travelogue-style journal chronicles the band's work in Haiti at The Hands & Feet Project, caring for orphans, and reminds us that the world can be changed, one child at a time.



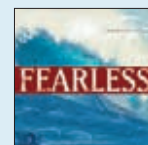
The first title in **ERIC WILSON's** Aramis Black series, *The Best of Evil* (WaterBrook), sounds like a who's who list for the dark side. Set in Nashville, the protagonist, must learn to overcome his violent tendencies and his past on the road to forgiveness...all while working through intrigue, solving a mystery and making for a seriously good read!



Looking for something along the lines of Harry Potter or Lemony Snicket's for your middle schooler, only something with more of a...well...*Christian* bent? Then, have we got some books for you! **R. K. MORTENSON's** Landon Snow series follows the exploits of an 11-year-old adventurer. Check out these titles today: *Landon Snow and the Auctor's Riddle*, *Landon Snow and the Shadows of Malus Quidam* and *Landon Snow and the Island of Arcanum* (Barbour). Seriously, these rock!



Have a New Year's resolution to finally write that book you've always wanted to write? Need some help getting started or polishing it up? In *Writing for the Soul: Instruction and Advice From an Extraordinary Writing Life* (Writer's Digest Books), **JERRY B. JENKINS**, best-selling author of the *Left Behind* series, provides his personal insight on life, career and Christianity. Make the writer in your life happy with a copy of this book at Christmas!



In *Fearless: 40 Reflections on Fear* (Regal), **TOM STEPHEN** & **VIRGINIA STARKEY** provide words and meditations meant to encourage the reader not to fear this world but to trust in God. Powerful images of surfing and other extreme sports from *Surfing Magazine* Senior Photographer **HANK FOTO** are also showcased.





A MODERN WINTER WONDERLAND

CHRISTMAS IS UPON US ONCE AGAIN, AND IN MY MIND THERE IS NO BETTER CHRISTMAS GIFT THAN THE PERFECT PIECE OF GEAR OR GADGET. IF YOU ARE ON THE HUNT FOR THE RIGHT GIFT, HERE ARE SEVERAL IDEAS WORTH YOUR ATTENTION.

>> THE SONY PSP:: (\$199)

The Sony PSP (PlayStation Portable) is the ultimate portable media machine that browses the Web, plays music and movies and views photos; but, best of all, it is a mean, lean portable gaming machine. The PSP's stunning widescreen LCD brings gaming to life.

Superstar mixing engineer **Shane D. Wilson (MercyMe, Michael W. Smith, newsboys)** talks about his PSP saying, "I dig my PSP because the screen looks fantastic, and its size makes it convenient to have handy in the control room. It just looks so cool, and it's a great way to take an ear break."



THE GRIFFIN PSP ITRIP FM TRANSMITTER:: (\$49.99)

One of the coolest PSP accessories is the Griffin PSP iTrip FM Transmitter which allows the PSP's audio to be transmitted through an FM radio (at frequencies from 88.1 - 107.9MHz). The iTrip has a built-in antenna and offers a sleek, slim design that slides securely onto the bottom of the PSP quickly and easily, without adding bulk. The iTrip requires two AA batteries and operates at a range of 10-30 feet. The easy-to-read display sends audio directly to the radio, allowing movies and games to rock at full volume.



THE 80GB APPLE IPOD:: (\$349)

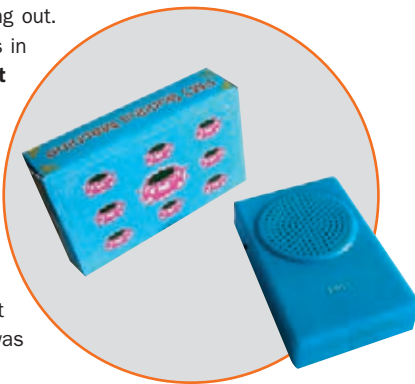
The iPod certainly isn't anything new, but it gets better and better every year. The current flagship is the 80 gig model that offers a 60 percent brighter display and provides enough space to store 20,000 songs. It provides the ability to carry movies, TV shows, videos, games, podcasts, audiobooks and photos in the palm of your hand with 20 hours of audio playback and six hours of video playback between charges.



THE BUDDHA MACHINE:: (\$25)

Yes, this is CCM, and, no, we aren't peddling Buddha, but The Buddha Machine is an amazing little box worth checking out. Similar to a classic little AM radio, the Buddha Machine is a hardware loop player that plays nine different built-in loops in an endless cycle with one button allowing you to fade between them. The creators, **FM3**, are the duo of **Christiaan Virant** and Chinese keyboardist and computer musician **Zhang Jian**, both based in Beijing. Fans of their Buddha Machine include studio whiz **Brian Eno (U2, Elvis Costello)** who bought eight. The Buddha Machine is available in six different colors (shipped randomly), and it includes a built-in speaker, a headphone output, volume control, a switch that rotates the loops and two AA batteries.

Popular artist, producer and songwriter **Don Chaffer (Waterdeep, Third Day, Sara Groves)** describes his experience with the Buddha Machine: "A good friend gave me the Buddha Machine as a gift, and I have found it quite useful. Not only has it been fun in the studio, [but] I even snuck it onto the dinner table one evening out with friends and watched the way the entire evening was calmed by the presence of soothing music... Okay, okay, actually the person closest thought it was too loud, and the rest of us couldn't hear it, but much fun was had by passing it around and arguing about which was our favorite loop."



GRIFFIN EARTHUMPS:: (\$29.99)

Now that you have a piece of gear that makes sound, it is important that you have the right device for getting the sound from gadget to ear. I'm in love with the Griffin EarThumps which deliver clean, transparent highs along with deep, rich bass. EarThumps are earbuds designed to isolate your listening experience from outside sound by fitting comfortably inside the ears to deliver rich, crystal clear audio. Why are EarThumps better than other earbuds? They have exceptional noise isolation; they have greater sound output and enhanced bass; they have three different-sized silicone inserts to perfectly match anyone's ear and they include a nylon zippered carrying case.



GEAR LINKS

For more information on the gear on this page, visit: turntablelab.com (Buddha Machine), griffintechnology.com (PSP iTrip FM Transmitter & EarThumps), us.playstation.com/PSP (PSP), apple.com (iPod)

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



From left: ZOEgirl, Natalie Grant, KJ-52, Tammy Trent

ZOEGIRL'S farewell/NATALIE GRANT/KJ-52/TAMMY TRENT "THE REVOLVE TOUR"

ALLEN COUNTY WAR MEMORIAL COLISEUM | FORT WAYNE, IN

There are many facets to "The Revolve Tour," starting with a bill of diverse artists seeking to not only share songs with fans, but tell their testimonies and stirring stories of God's faithfulness. The event comes from Women of Faith organizers, but this time is geared toward teens (particularly young ladies) as they seek out spiritual mentoring, sound Biblical teaching and a break for carefree fun. The multiple concert segments encompass slices of each element, giving attendees even more intimate glimpses than usual of the artists they admire, while placing them against stadium-size production.

One highlight of a recent Midwestern trek was ZOEgirl, who is simultaneously celebrating the new CD release *With All of My Heart: The Greatest Hits* (Sparrow) and the members' farewell to touring. Though the 6,000 attendees were certainly disappointed about the "goodbye" angle, they were sent away singing loud and proud to several of the group's most beloved pop selections. The ladies obliged with all the essentials in the swansong show, such as the accelerated duo "Dead Serious" and "Beautiful Name," which balanced high octane beats with encouragement for young people to stand up for their beliefs.

The introduction to "Plain" was an early example of how singing and speaking were intertwined as it reminded all that living up to the world's images will always lead to a dead end. As the trio sat and swayed on stools, the lyrics preached God's unconditional love for those He created, regardless of their human imperfections. "I Believe" brought the energy up to its apex and continued in the group's more recent tradition of being backed by an electrically focused band over accompaniment tracks. This served them much better than the original studio version (which is starting to sound dated) and laid the ground work for more current cuts such as "Scream" and "You Get Me."

While the adoring shouts and screams indicated the group will be missed, the program still provided many reasons to smile, including several rapidly fired rap rounds by KJ-52. The rhyme slayer, his DJ and backing band increased the male presence and had teens of all genders and ages bobbing with delight. His charismatic approach to the microphone was felt immediately as he tossed between the colorful tunes "Fivetweezy," "Rock With It" and "Things I Like."

Natalie Grant, meanwhile, balanced worship ("Jesus Loves Me"), a few originals from the multiple Dove Award-winning CD *Awaken* (Curb) and a gripping talk. The pop star addressed dating and how one should never get into a relationship for the wrong reasons, always keeping Christ as the center. She then dove deep into her struggle with bulimia and temptations of wanting to fit in with the airbrushed actresses and supermodels on magazine covers. But again, she turned the topic toward God and how He can deliver anyone from eating disorders, along with feelings of inferiority caused by the false pleasures of pop culture.

Tammy Trent rounded out the marathon with equally hopeful pleas, especially in times of desperation and loneliness. She's felt both emotions firsthand after losing her husband to a diving accident but has since bounced back and turned her trust to the Lord. Songs like "Welcome Home" and "At the Foot of the Cross" helped tie those themes together and tangibly trace her process of surrender. And, at the end of the experience, these reflections (plus the aforementioned) sent all away uplifted, refreshed and equipped to go fearlessly forward, while letting their worlds "revolve" around Godly concepts rather than superficial snares.

For upcoming dates on "The Revolve Tour," log onto therevolvetour.com.

CLUB CONNECTION

Giving concertgoers a look at one of the country's coolest Christian venues



The **FOUNDRY** may be one of Joplin, Missouri's fastest-growing Christian concert clubs since opening in 2003, but it has an incredibly interactive building and ministry called The Bridge to thank. The

64,000 square foot facility includes a rock climbing gym, Internet café, cage basketball, ramp park and, of course, a place to check out cool tunes.

Thus far The Foundry has had a wide spectrum of alternative acts such as **Pillar**, **Dead Poetic** and **Spoken** but has also hosted acoustic troubadours like **Shawn McDonald** and houses a "Singer/Songwriter Night" on most Tuesdays. While promoters encourage everyone to attend regardless of beliefs, there are no drugs, alcohol, violence or even ignorance permitted. One of the most amusing but intriguing rules even proclaims "All you have to do is leave your attitudes and prejudices at the door!"

For additional information, log onto thebridgejoplin.com/foundry.

HERE AND THERE

ARE YOU WITHIN A DAY'S DRIVE?

Here's a concert date you won't want to miss!

12/09 "Behold the Lamb of God Tour" featuring Andrew Peterson, Derek Webb, Andrew Osenga & Jill Phillips—Orlando, FL

For the latest concert listings, check out CCMmagazine.com's searchable tour database to find out when your favorite artists will play in a city near you.

All concert photos by Andy Argyrakis

THINGS I ♥

With REBECCA ST. JAMES



<< You cannot be Australian and not love the **beach**. It is simply an essential Aussie trait! Here I am overlooking the azure waters of St. Thomas, Virgin Islands.



Christina Rossetti once wrote, "Love came down at Christmas/Love all lovely, love divine/Love was born at Christmas/Stars and angels gave the sign." Ah! During this month of love and wishes for peace on earth, we've asked REBECCA ST. JAMES to share some things she loves...



>> I love **New York City!** Hanging with the Barlows on Brooklyn Bridge.



<< I adore **my sister, Libby!** She is a legend. From time to time, we have a "Sisters' Day" and go and paint pottery. Here we are displaying our most recent works of art.



>> I love my **family**. Here we are pictured all together in the tour bus at the beginning of our March/April tour with BarlowGirl and Jadon Lavik.



<< I love to **play**. It rocks to get to be a big kid every now and then. The band and I were bored while waiting for our flight out of Chicago O'Hare and decided to play in the kids' airplane! From left: Charmaine Carrasco, me, Fred Williams and Scott Murray.



>> All I have to say is...I hope there's **coffee** in heaven. It sure seems like it would fit!



>> I so enjoy **nature!** I see God's creativity and power in it. This pic is of my brother/housemate Joel and me during a family visit to Vancouver Island, B.C.

All she wants for Christmas is a chance. If I Had One Chance to Tell You Something (Forefront), it would be that she loves her most recent album (the aforementioned *Chance*). OK...so that sounded better out loud. For the latest on Rebecca, visit rsjames.com.



LOOSE ENDS

CONFESSIONS OF AN UNFINISHED FAITH

BY NICHOLE NORDEMAN



Poor Me

On September 18, *TIME Magazine* slapped a photo of a shiny Rolls Royce on its cover. And in place of its trademark silver-winged maiden was the hood ornament of a glistening Christian cross. It looked like something the Pope might drive if he was giving Snoop Dog a lift somewhere. Not exactly subtle. And for every person waiting casually in a supermarket line, or any last minute browsers at an airport newsstand, it was hard to miss the big block letters splashed across the front of the Rolls, posing the faintly condemnatory question, "DOES GOD WANT YOU TO BE RICH?"

The cover story centered around the ongoing debate regarding the theological sturdiness of what is commonly called the "Prosperity Gospel"...a teaching in many churches today that riches and material blessings are ours for the taking, that God desires to lavish them on His people without restraint, and that we should claim and receive them for the gifts they are. This article highlighted many of the evangelical elite (from Joel Osteen to Rick Warren) and, in my opinion, painted a pretty fair portrait of the differing views from today's most notable pastors. Honestly, it was well worth reading.

Does God want you to be rich? I'm hardly qualified to answer. But I do believe it's a very important question for each Christian to ask oneself...and answer, all by oneself. I believe answers are generally few and foggy, like most really important questions that arise from a deep place of uncertainty. But it's the self-examination that is the real point. And, the conviction that might follow.

I toured with Casting Crowns this past spring. It was a big group of us on the road...around 60 people, including every truck driver, crew member, nanny and guitar tech. Eric Brown took a job on that tour selling merch. CDs, hats, T-shirts, jewelry...if you left with some concert memorabilia from the "Lifesong Tour," chances are Eric sold it to you. Incredibly nice guy. Very quiet and laid back. I wish now that I'd spent some time getting to know him on the road...because only months later in a coffee shop in Nashville did I

learn about his story...and how his perspective on wealth would begin to quietly shape mine.

Eric grew up in the church—good Baptist home. Solid Christian parents. And despite this sturdy foundation, he ventured down some unlikely roads and found himself, at age 21, already divorced and beginning an emotional and mental spiral into self-absorbed anguish. He basically had a major meltdown. Not the kind that a good vacation or a 'chin-up' sort of pep talk can shake you out of, but the kind that would, in a short time, land him on the streets. Literally. Homeless. Living out of a car, at times, and underneath freeways at others. It was astonishing to hear his story and realize how quickly a few wrong turns can mean the difference between youth group and a soup kitchen.

I asked him about the obvious culprits that preclude homelessness...the mental checklist of questions I go through when I'm waiting at that unbearably long red light trying not to look at the guy with the cardboard sign two feet from my window. The same ones you're asking yourself right now. I asked about alcohol. None. I asked about any kind of substance abuse. Nada. I even winced and asked if he was just lazy. "Not an issue," he said, and I believed him.

For Eric, it seemed, life as a homeless person was part of a much bigger spiritual picture, looking back. He has a perspective on wealth that not many of us will ever have. It was painful to listen to him relate how shameful it felt to knock on the door of a church or sit in the pastor's study with the cherry maple bookcases and the flat panel TV and beg for a job scrubbing toilets. And be turned down. Or, to watch the receptionist scrounge around in the "food bank" for a can of pork and beans that expired two months ago and then send him on his way. As he told his story, I felt shame too...as a Christian. Not for my part in his journey, but for my lack of one.

I could fill 20 pages of what Eric shared with me that morning over coffee. And how it has haunted me...not with guilt, but with a call to personal accountability about the importance and priority that "things" and money play in my

life. That's what I took from the *TIME Magazine* article. I'm not necessarily that interested in Joel Osteen's position, but I realized I *must* have my own. Apathy is the enemy here.

Eric's journey out of that situation is probably the most inspiring part of his story. If I had to describe him in a word, it would be "unencumbered." It's been awhile since I've seen someone at such peace. Despite the outside improvements in his life (He is happily married with a good job, a nice roof over his head and plenty of food on his table.), his peace will never come from his paycheck. Like anyone who has been broken, he will always walk with a limp. The good kind. He has not allowed

bitterness to take root toward the church or the culture. But he has a healthy cynicism and speaks with a beautiful detachment about money and security that is enviable.

Ask about Biblical direction on this topic? He'll send you straight to 2 Corinthians 8. Ask if anybody inspires him? He'll gush over Derek Webb's music. Ask what his worst-case scenario is..."Monetary wealth,"

he says, without hesitating.

Eventually, I watched his face soften and stare out the window for a time, as if he was remembering an old friend. Then, he quietly mentioned that some days he misses the simple intimacy he had with Jesus back then. "It was all I had," he says faintly. And all he really needed.

Later that night, I spent some time in the Scripture he mentioned, considering what Paul had to say on the subject.

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."—2 Corinthians 8:9 (New International Version)

And I wonder, this month, whether Mary and Joseph understood the same...having never seen the inside of a Rolls Royce, but understanding how profoundly wealthy they were in the middle of a filthy barn.

In Excelsis Deo, Nichole

For more information on Nichole Nordeman and her latest album *Brave (Sparrow)*, visit nicholenordeman.com.

CLASSIFIEDS

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HISTORYMAKERS WITH JOHN STYLL

MOMENTS THAT SHAPED CCM

EXPLORING THE HISTORY OF THE CROSSOVER PHENOMENON



From left: Pat Boone, B.J. Thomas and Amy Grant

PLEASE PASS THE SALT

"Crossover." The term describes a scenario where one genre of music gains popularity within another genre. For example, a country song that becomes a pop hit is considered a "crossover" song. Or a song from the Christian world that finds its way onto the mainstream rock charts would be considered a "crossover."

The word evokes a variety of thoughts from the Christian music community. When a Christian song crosses over to pop or country, some see it as a form of evangelism—or at least consistent with Jesus' admonition to be "salt" and "light" in the world. Others see it as selling out, especially if the artist doesn't seem to have taken the "cross over."

In the formative years of contemporary Christian music, it was the goal of many of the artists to one day make a record "good enough" that it would get airplay on "Top 40" radio.

Oddly enough, it happened first with a sort of "reverse crossover." **Dan Peek**, formerly of the pop group America, released an album on a Christian label in 1979. He went from mainstream pop to contemporary Christian instead of the other way around. The title song, "All Things Are Possible," spent more than six months on the *Billboard* Adult Contemporary chart.

But the first real "Top 40" crossover finally happened in 1985 when **Amy Grant's** "Find A Way" peaked at No. 29 on the *Billboard* "Hot 100." Some in the Christian community accused Amy of selling out, of course. However, it was no small matter that mainstream radio stations were playing a song containing the line, "If our God His Son not sparing, came to rescue you/Is there any circumstance He can't see you through?"

I was one of those who, since the early '70s, had been hoping and praying for a Christian artist to break through on the pop charts. It was an emotional moment the first time I heard "Find A Way" on a mainstream pop station.

That wasn't the first time, of course, that Christian lyrics were heard on mainstream radio. Over the years there have been a number of pop hits with gospel lyrics. "Oh Happy Day," by the **Edwin Hawkins Singers**, started it off in the late '60s as the Jesus People Movement was taking shape in America. "Amazing Grace" was a hit twice, once as a vocal by **Judy Collins** and once as an instrumental (bagpipes!). "Jesus Is A Soul Man," "I Knew Jesus (Before He Was A Superstar)," "Jesus is Just Alright," and many more hit the charts. Except for "Oh Happy Day," these were all performed by pop artists.

One of the first well-known pop artists to record Christian music was the legendary **Pat Boone**. **B.J. Thomas** had a notable debut in the Christian market in 1976, and since that time many others have recorded gospel music—including **Dion** ("Abraham, Martin & John"), the late **Billy Preston** ("You Are So Beautiful"), **Philip Bailey** of Earth, Wind & Fire, British pop star **Cliff Richard**, and many others from pop and rock's early era. This magazine devoted an entire issue to Christians in mainstream music in August 1980. Pop legend and (at the time) recent Christian convert **Bob Dylan** was featured on the cover. More recently, artists including country stars **Randy Travis**, **Alan Jackson** and **The Oak Ridge Boys** have cut gospel albums, as has guitar great **Jonny Lang**.

Songs originating in the Christian music community that have become legitimate pop hits are few and far between, but there have been a couple in each of the last three decades. In the late '80s there was a song called "Dear Mr. Jesus" by pre-teen **Sharon Battis** that took pop radio by storm. **Bob Carlisle's** "Butterfly Kisses" was a sentimental quasi-Christian song that was a monster hit in 1997. **MercyMe's** 2001 mega-hit "I Can Only Imagine" was as unlikely of a crossover song as one could imagine.

Most readers are probably aware of other mainstream crossover successes: **Michael W. Smith** ("Place in This World"), **Kathy Troccoli** ("Everything Changes"), **Jars of Clay** ("Flood"), **dcTalk** ("Between You and Me"); **Switchfoot**, **P.O.D.**, **Stacie Orrico**, several Amy Grant singles and a number of others.

Will Christian crossover ever become a trend? Doubt it, especially for songs that overtly contain religious language. Not to take anything away from the hard work of the record label and the band itself, but I believe the success of "I Can Only Imagine" was a sovereign act of God. Mainstream radio is not in the business of spreading the gospel. But how cool that glimpses of God can be seen from time to time when music from our community spills over into popular culture. Tasty and illuminating. Salt and light.

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.