

CCM

CHRIS AUGUST

**SURRENDER vs
DO-IT-YOURSELF**
DEPENDING ON CHRIST
FOR THE WIN



ANDRAÉ CROUCH

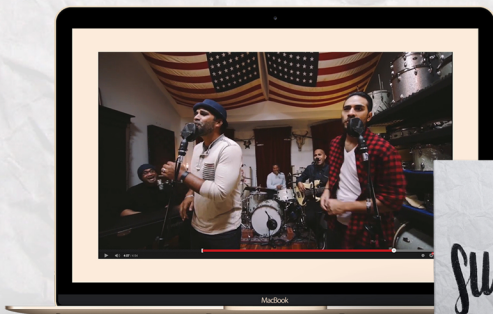
THE EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
WITH HIS TWIN SISTER!

APR 1, 2015



"We just want to say a big thank you to all of radio for supporting us by playing our singles. We really appreciate you and we appreciate the love."

- The Katinas



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"KYCC is excited to add '10,000 Reasons' by the Katinas, a fresh update of Matt Redman's worship favorite. Their smooth, soulful delivery and tight harmonies are sure to make the Katinas' version a hit with our listeners."

- Theresa Schaad, MD -

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YouTube

Artist: The Katinas
Album: Sunday Set
Radio Single: 10,000 Reasons

Radio Contact
Jeff McLaughlin
A-Sides Radio Promotion
jeff@asidesradiopromotion.com
615.530.3654



FEATURES

Chris August

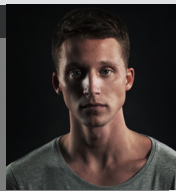
From life-threatening tragedy to life-long dependence on *The Maker*, Chris shares his personal transformation story

**Andraé Crouch**

The must-read exclusive interview with twin sister Sandra Crouch—stay tuned to CCMMagazine.com in April for bonus coverage!

**NF**

Building upon a strong foundation, new Capitol signee releases debut *Mansion* to a worldwide audience

**I Am They**

New worship-band-turned full-time road warriors explain the meaning behind their unique name and discuss paying their dues on tour



DEPTS

FROM THE EDITOR

PHOTOS

OUT AND ABOUT

Pics of your favorite Christian artists on the road, off the road and everywhere in between

REVIEWS

PASSION, JONATHAN THULIN, MATT MAHER + MORE!

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We are the reason | As *CCM Magazine* has recently relived the events from **CCMUnited's** *We Will Stand: Celebrating 40 Years of Contemporary Christian Music*, there is one performance from that evening that I can't get out of my head: **David Meece's** "We Are The Reason."

It was the first time I have heard this song since I was a kid, but fondly remember its unmistakable melody, and well, as I mentioned it just won't leave me! As I have caught myself humming and singing the tune, in particular over the past few weeks, I have finally paused to reflect on its lyrics:

Chorus: *And we are the reason that He gave His life / We are the reason that He suffered and died / To a world that was lost He gave all He could give / To show us the reason to live*

As we approach Easter, I am thankful that this song—even in all of its early-eighties-glorious—has crept back into my conscious, as the poignancy of its powerful message is extremely appropriate. *He gave ALL He could give—He gave His life.*

As you dive into this edition of *CCM Magazine*, you will read how cover artist **Chris August** overcame a series of tragic events that eventually led to his complete and total surrender to Jesus. Quoting the Bridge from Meece's classic, I pray that this Easter we can reflect on Christ's love for us—His reason to be—and to find, restore, or increase our reason for living:

I finally found the reason for living / It's in giving every part of my heart to Him / In all that I do every word that I say / I'll be giving my all just for Him / For Him

Blessings,



Kevin Sparkman
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Andy Argyrakis is a Chicago-based entertainment writer/photographer who appears in the *Chicago Tribune*, *Illinois Entertainer*, *Hear/Say Magazine*, *Concert Livewire* and more.



Grace Aspinwall is a freelance writer and music critic for various entities, and currently runs her own copywriting company. She resides in beautiful Southern Oregon with her husband and two young daughters.



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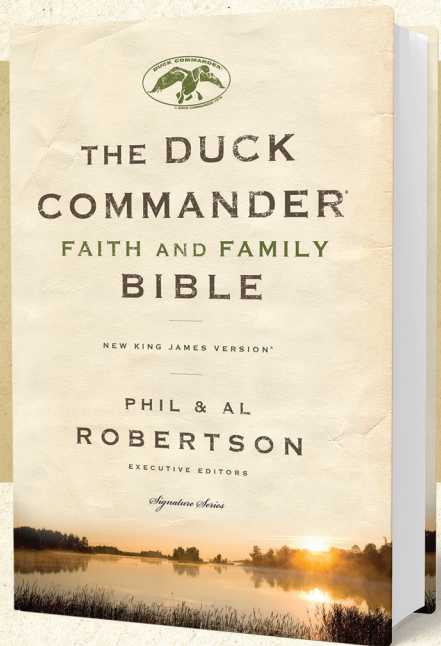


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PHOTOS COURTESY: RUSSELL A. GRAVES





COMPILED BY ANDY ARGYRAKIS

1 & **2** Artists, celebrities and fans from literally all walks of life packed the West Angeles Church of God In Christ to pay their respects to legendary gospel great Andraé Crouch. Famed duo BeBe & CeCe Winans, along with Sweet Comfort Band member/solo veteran Bryan Duncan are shown arriving at the concert and Celebration of Life service, which drew more than 600,000 viewers during a stream on BET.com and the church's website.

3 Shadowlands Music recording artist Jean Watson (right) took time out from recording her upcoming CD to attend the National Religious Broadcasters conference (NRB) in Nashville. While there, Watson met *Saturday Night Live* alumnus, actress and comedian Victoria Jackson (left), who was also attending the conference.



4 R&B, soul and sometimes-gospel singer KEM may have visited Chicago's United Center to promote his latest Kemistry/Motown project, *Promise To Love*; but he also shared his testimony, suggesting there would be no record deal, sold-out shows or deliverance from past problems (including drug addiction and homelessness) without his reliance on the Lord.

5 Steven Curtis Chapman, host of "Sam's Place" at Nashville's historic Ryman Auditorium, takes a break with the guest artists from February's show. Pictured from left to right: Shelley Breen (Point of Grace), Ellie Holcomb, Chapman, Kristian Bush, Denise Jones (Point of Grace), Josh Turner, Leigh Cappillino (Point of Grace), Aaron Watson.



Photo: Andy Argyrakis



6 Chapman also grabbed a moment backstage with Ellie Holcomb after performing their duet of his popular “Be Still and Know.” Joining them backstage was Ellie’s husband, Drew, lead singer of the band Drew Holcomb and The Neighbors.

6





THINK.

What do I believe?



ACT.

What should I do?



BE.

Who am I becoming?

It's one thing to **KNOW THE STORY OF THE BIBLE.**
It's another thing to **LIVE IT.**

**31-DAY
READING PLAN**

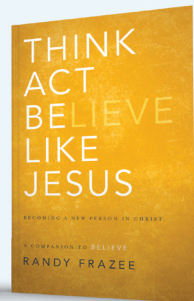
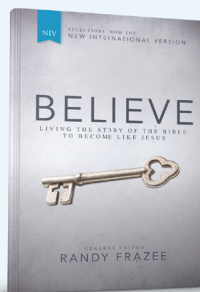
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General editor and pastor Randy Frazee walks you through the:

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- 10 key Practices of a Jesus-follower
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**CHRIS
AUGUST
MEETING
HIS MAKER**

BY CAROLINE LUSK

We are a generation of do-it-yourselfers. From websites to home repairs to finances to relationships, we are conditioned to have endless resources at the touch a button, endless amounts of information with the click of a mouse and relentless expectations to be the next better thing now.

While such an environment creates a lot of self-reliant producers, it can also encourage people to cut corners. Our default is the quick-start guide. We push aside the full manufacturer's guide, learn just enough to accomplish a task, and move on. As a result, we make and do a lot of stuff but the consistent preference of quantity over quality can put us in compromising situations when things don't go as planned.

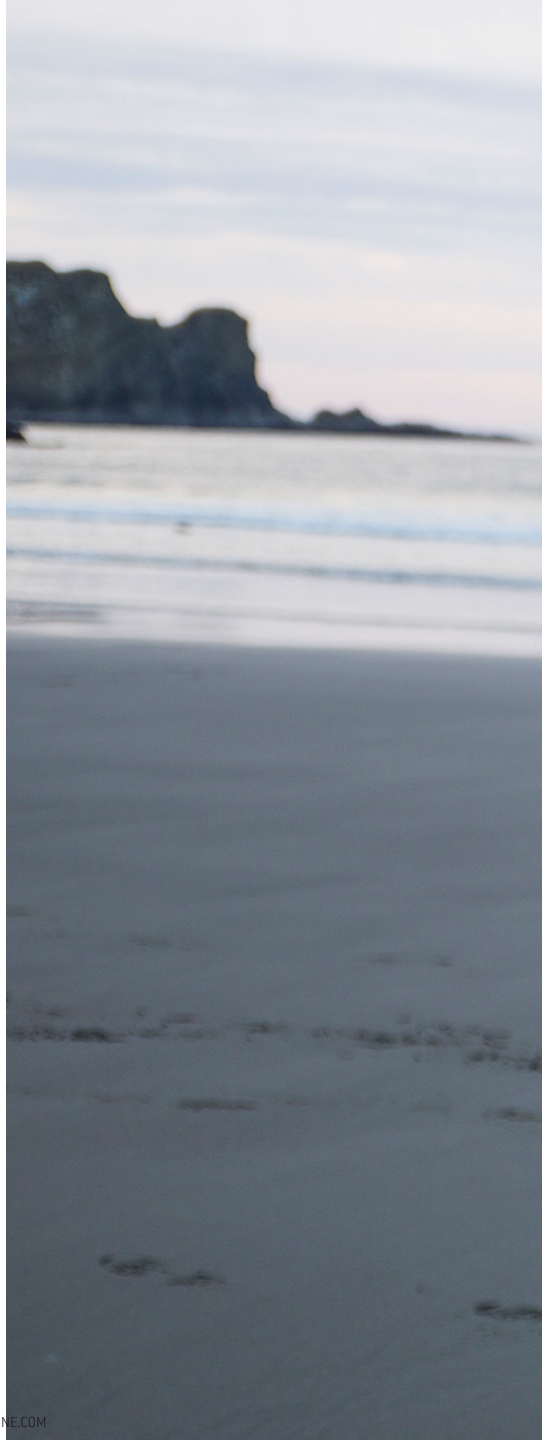
Chris August is a master do-it-yourselfer. Musically, he's been ahead of the game since he started. Creative, quick-thinking and plugged-in, he claimed the Dove Award for New Artist of the Year and Male Vocalist of the Year following his debut release from Word Records in 2011. He was in demand, lauded and well on his way to a successful career in Christian music.

And then, things didn't go as planned.


A freak skateboarding accident put him in the hospital, threatened his life and could have left him in an indefinite vegetative state. Fortunately, he began to recover. As his body healed, the doctors prescribed the normal, acceptable medications for his condition and pain management—and then prescribed more to help him manage those.

"My pill box was the size of a laptop," Chris recalls. "It was crazy. I'd take one thing and then need another to deflect those side-effects, and then another and another."

At that point, Chris had enough; so he attempted to wean himself off one dose at a time. It was a valiant effort, but one that left its own mark on Chris' already weary psyche.





A man with short brown hair, a beard, and glasses is looking directly at the camera. He is wearing a dark quilted jacket over a plaid shirt. The background is a blurred outdoor setting. The text is overlaid in the center of the image in a bold, white, sans-serif font.

**FROM MUSIC TO RELATIONSHIPS
TO HIS OWN FAITH, CHRIS HAS
EMBRACED A LIFE OF SURRENDER
OVER A D-I-Y EXISTENCE.
NO MORE QUICK-STARTS.
NO MORE SHORTCUTS.**

“I was acting weird,” he recalls. “I just felt weird.”

His friends noticed, and they suggested he see a counselor.

“And the counselor suggested I see a psychiatrist,” he says with a skeptical tone, recalling his frustration and lack of hope at the time.

The psychiatrist’s diagnosis was on-point with Chris’ condition—which found Chris at odds with his profession. Battling severe depression, as a Christian recording artist he now wondered how he was going to truthfully encourage hope into the lives of others.

“There’s this level of pride that we try to keep and maintain, especially with someone who does what I do,” he shares. “So many people think that [artists] have it together.”

Never one to put on a front, Chris knew he didn’t have it together, nor was he interested in pretending that he did.

“It was by far the hardest year of my life,” says Chris. “But that’s when a huge breakthrough happened.”

He was touring with **Big Daddy Weave**, who makes a point to have prayer and ministry with the people who attend their concerts every night. For Chris, who didn’t grow up in a church, this was foreign to him, at best.

“I became a Christian in my teens,” he shares. “But I had never seen Christians doing the things they were doing. I usually just went to church once a week, just like everyone else...and that was about it. This was unlike anything I’d experienced before.”

He saw people being healed—their bodies, their hearts, their lives.

“I’m just sitting here thinking, *Man, I’m on all this medication, and half of the time I don’t even think it’s working,*” he remembers. “I said, *I’m going to just ask the Lord to heal me of this.*”

“It wasn’t a gradual thing,” he clarifies. “It was an overnight thing. I woke up the next day, and I didn’t take one more pill; and I haven’t since. That doesn’t mean it’s not still

hard at times. It also doesn’t mean that I can just sit back, do nothing and wait for healing to take over. I had to make steps and put in the effort, while walking through it with the Healer...the Maker.”

In that moment of healing, Chris threw out the quick-start guide and began devouring Scripture like he never had before. He studied Greek and Hebrew. He spent hours reading and re-reading that which he had discovered held his true healing. And day after day, as he dove into the Ultimate Manufacturer’s guide, he began to see, love and need that Manufacturer—that Maker—with a passion he’d never known before.

“I spent hours every day digging deeper,” he shares, “learning more about who God is and who I can be. I wanted it to be on my mind all the time.”

Daily, his thoughts, decisions, mood and purpose became oriented in a completely new way. So much so, that he scrapped a batch of songs he had in the works for what was, at the time, his forthcoming third studio album.

“I liked what I was working on, and it was very much in-line with Christian radio; but I felt like it would be a lie to put those songs out because that’s not at all where I was when I was going through this,” he shares.

Chris was in a place of experiencing healing in an era that often dismisses miracles as things that happened in biblical but not now. That led to the song “He’s Still Here.”

He was in a place of seeing his own faults, vulnerabilities, insecurities and mistakes and realizing the need to live in a state of grace while extending it to others. That was the foundation of the song “Drop Your Stone.”

He was also in a place of facing the reality of depression and making choices each day to either surrender it or let it overwhelm him. From there came the song “Muddy Waters.”

Track by track, the album, aptly called **The Maker**, tells the story of his own heart and the truth of who and Whose he is. Perhaps no

song captures that more poignantly than the title track. With Scripture at the forefront of his life, He began to not only see the working of God in his own life but the presence of God throughout creation.

Everything that you have made is beautiful / Oh my God, I can't believe my eyes...

– “The Maker”

As his eyes have adjusted to the view, the omnipresence of a healing, present God, Chris is digging deeper in every aspect of his life. From music to relationships to his own faith, Chris has embraced a life of surrender over a D-I-Y existence. No more quick-starts or shortcuts. He's all in—committed to the stories, encouragement and hope within the ultimate guide and more aware than ever of his desperate need for the perfect

love and redemption only the author of time can provide.

He's not perfect. There are good days and bad days, and he will be the first to say that he hasn't arrived at some spiritual precipice.

“I'm figuring it out like everybody else,” he says. “I just happen to be a guy who writes songs.”

Songs of revelation, songs of hope, songs of struggle and songs of victory...and within each one there lies the most fundamental and transformative truth of all time...

I love the Maker / And the Maker loves me.

– “The Maker” CCM

 **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, VISIT
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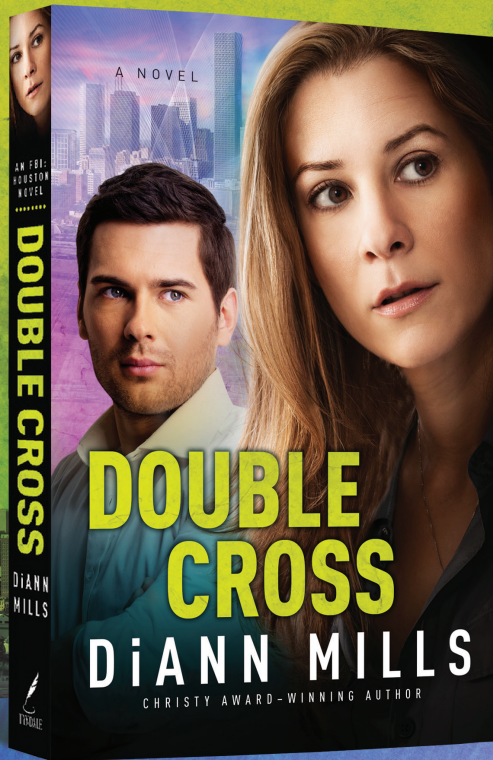


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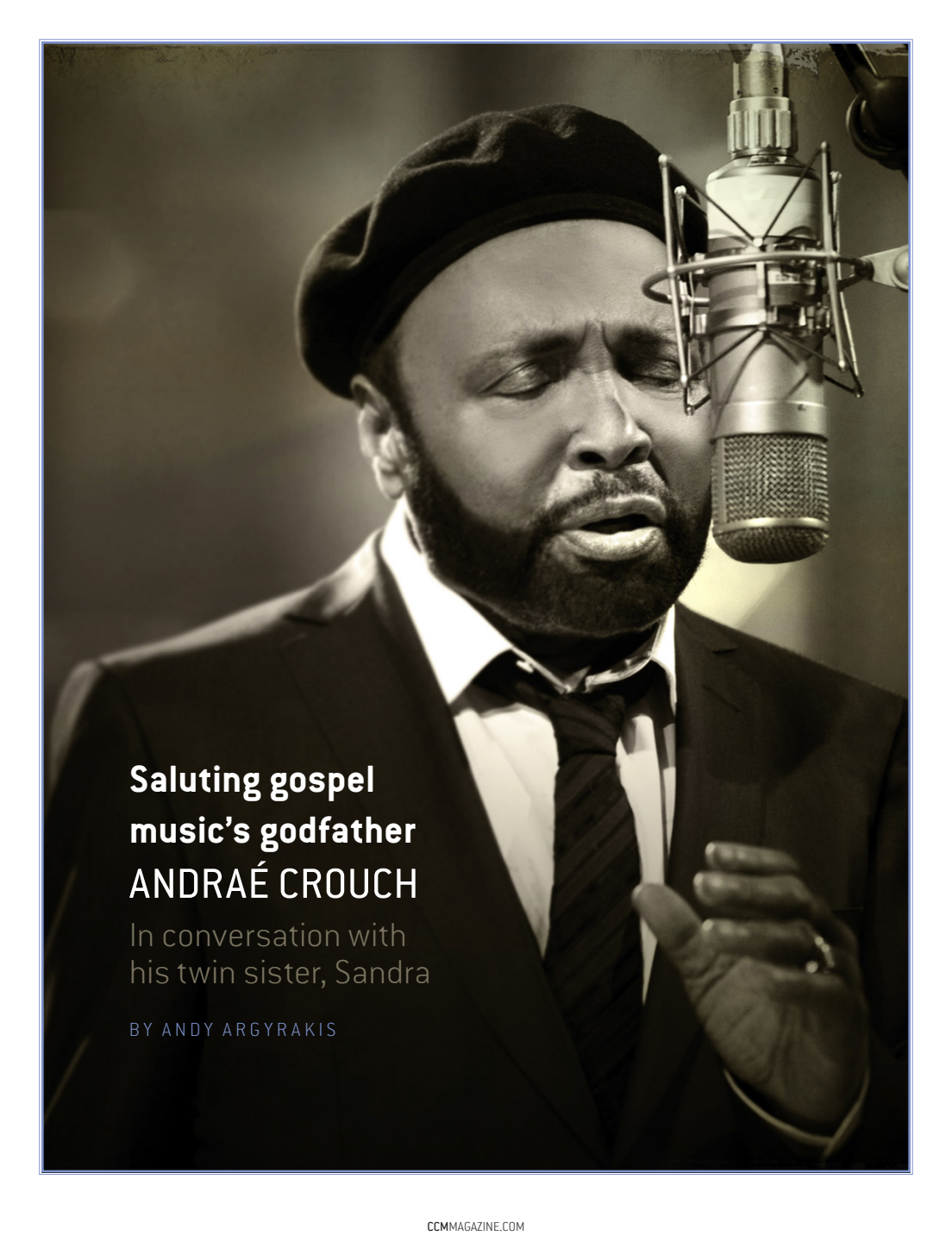


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**Saluting gospel
music's godfather
ANDRAÉ CROUCH**

In conversation with
his twin sister, Sandra

BY ANDY ARGYRAKIS

He may be considered one of gospel music's ultimate godfathers with a vast body of work dating back to the late 1960s, but **Andraé Crouch** reached well beyond the primary genre he pioneered throughout the next five decades. Besides scoring seven GRAMMY Awards, six Dove Awards, membership in the Gospel Music Hall of Fame and a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, the singer/songwriter/arranger/producer/pastor notched an Academy Award nomination for his musical contributions to *The Color Purple*, followed by work on the Disney movie-turned-Broadway blockbuster *The Lion King*. Along the way, his songs were recorded by the likes of **Elvis Presley** and **Paul Simon**, while additional production and arrangement credits span **Michael Jackson, Madonna, Diana Ross, Elton John** and **Quincy Jones** (to cite a mere handful).

It's no wonder that prominent artists of virtually every style joined more than 4,000 family members and friends at Crouch's recent Celebration of Life following his passing at the age of 72 in January 2015 due to complications from a heart attack. In addition to **Stevie Wonder, BeBe & CeCe Winans, Shirley Caesar, Yolanda Adams, Richard Smallwood, Donald Lawrence, Israel Houghton, Donnie McClurkin, Kirk Franklin, Edwin and Lynette Hawkins, Rev. Jesse Jackson, Dr. Bobby Jones** (among many others) performing or speaking in his honor, **Bishop T.D. Jakes, Bill and Gloria Gaither** and **Michael W. Smith** were some of the several who taped condolences for the service at West Angeles Church of God In Christ, which was simultaneously broadcast to more than 600,000 people all over the globe on BET.com (even **President**

Barack Obama and **former President Bill Clinton** sent letters of tribute and support to the family).

Shortly thereafter, *CCM* had the honor of speaking with Andraé's twin sister, **Sandra Crouch**, a pastor, esteemed gospel artist in her own right and regular collaborator with Andraé Crouch and The Disciples to name just a few. The insightful conversation not only reflects upon her brother's extraordinary creative life but also offers many rare insights into the man behind so much life-changing music (with additional online bonus questions revealing fascinating facts about Sandra's solo career, her work with Motown and their role in Michael Jackson's historic "Man In The Mirror" session).

CCM: First off Sandra, how are you doing as you're walking through this storm?

SANDRA CROUCH: Well, you know when people say "I'm praying for you"? Trust me when I tell you there is power in prayer! Some people that aren't believers, they'll call it a good thought, but I know it's the name of Jesus. I tell people at the church I have a Kleenex in one hand and my armor in my other hand. The Lord has not allowed me to get into a real pity thing, you know? He just won't let me stay there because my assignment is not over. I can't afford to put the covers over my head because I know that would not please God.

CCM: Could you speak about Andraé's status as a gospel music pioneer?

SANDRA: Well Andraé didn't fit into a mold, and I think that's why you would

call him a legend or an innovator at the beginning of contemporary gospel music. He just wrote what he heard. [For instance], he loved Hawaii, and he would write a song in that style. Or he would go to Japan or somewhere else, and he would write [in that style]. [Legendary producer] Quincy Jones used to say that Andraé believed in the thirteenth key because he would just play chords that he heard. He didn't have any formal training, and really that was just a divine gift from God. He was not limited to any style. We would go places at the end of the '60s or early '70s; and if he wanted to hear horns and strings, he would just do it. He would take horn players into churches where they could barely bring a tambourine, and it was just absolutely awesome.

CCM: *It was always great to hear Andraé make amazing gospel music but even more exciting to see him branch out into so many styles, whether it be pop or R&B, sacred or secular. How did that diversity help communicate his message to such a vast audience?*

SANDRA: So many people heard of Andraé Crouch, Andraé Crouch and The Disciples and The Andraé Crouch Singers. We've been on *Saturday Night Live* and *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson* and a lot of those big shows years ago. People would say, "I like that song. It has good lyrics and a good beat." I won't name them, but there were a lot of top secular recording artists and comedians who came to [Andraé's Celebration of Life] out of respect and knowing the impact that his music has made. I've since gotten texts from people who wrote "[at the service] when you said 'I'm going to fight,' it made

me want to know a God like that." These are not believers, but they said, "I want to know that kind of God." This is a wonderful opportunity for not just me, but it's a wonderful opportunity that you can say "hey, this is a man that knew God. Maybe you would like to explore this" and just share Jesus in a way that's not intimidating, you know?

I think the way that Andraé wrote, his words were not threatening. They were more encouraging. Andraé was not intimidating, and he was everybody's friend. He'd go over to different people's houses for years and years and just play the piano and sing. He felt like he was your friend, and he was very easily approachable. [After he passed away], I got so many emails and text messages and people who came to his service saying, "you know, Andraé came to my house" or "he sang at my mother's funeral" or "he sang at my wedding." He flew to this place or that place just to sing. He did that all his life. That's the way he was.

Andraé probably has given away more CD's than people bought. He carried boxes of them in his car, and every time we went to the doctor's office, he said "give them a CD," and he'd sign autographs. One time he was in the hospital a few years ago, and he said "bring my piano"; and he just did praise and worship for everybody. They were crying and weeping and said, "Wow, this is great. Andraé Crouch is down the hall!" He was playing music, and people were coming in wheelchairs just to listen to him play. That's the kind of man my brother was.

CCM: *Did Andraé ever marry and have children or was he committed exclusively to ministry?*



Top: André and twin sister Sandra Crouch share the stage during a taped concert performance.

Left: Twins Sandra and André in an early family photo.

Bottom: A young André Crouch performs.





SANDRA: His children were his singers. He never married. There was a young lady he really, really loved; and I did everything I could do to hook them up. If she had been shaped like a piano, I think they would've had kids! (*laughs*) But he never married; he just loved ministry.

CCM: *Why do you think so many major artists, even beyond the gospel world, sought out André as a collaborator?*

SANDRA: You know, believe it or not, people like Madonna and Michael Jackson and Diana Ross and Quincy Jones, they like gospel music; and they liked André.

He was great at blending the voices and harmonies, you know? They liked that sound, so they would say, "We want that Andraé Crouch sound"; and we'd put together the singers we always used. When Quincy Jones was producing Michael Jackson, Andraé would ask him, "What do you want me to do?" and he'd say, "Just do what you do." When we did *The Color Purple*, they said, "Just write something and do whatever you do." That's what he did; and they said, "That's good, we'll take it."

Any time Andraé sat at the piano he could write music. There was never a time when it was a dull moment. In fact, when he would go to the studio to record, he'd have his singers and his musicians there and he'd say "wait a minute, I've got an idea for a song." I'd say "Andraé, you can't write another song with all these people here. You've got to write it when you go home."

CCM: *Did he leave behind any unfinished works and, if so, do you have any plans to release them?*



SANDRA: We have probably more 1,500 songs he didn't record, but we're going to get them out and let the world hear them. It's important that you build on the legacy. A legacy is a foundation you build on, and I think it would be encouraging for people who are here and for young people in particular. I've gotten a lot of emails from young kids, like ages thirteen and fourteen, who didn't know his music; but they've been downloading his stuff and saying, "I can't believe I've never heard his music."

His music has taken on wings of its own; and I thank God for that because not only do I love my brother, but the world loves my brother. I love the respect they have for his gifts, and that's a tremendous blessing. Sometimes when people pass away, you know, they're left to grieve alone; but I thank God that the world feels a loss just as I do, not as deep, but they feel that loss. That's the comfort and strength I needed to continue on and put the music out. Music can touch your heart in a way that I think nothing else can.



CCM: *Do you have any words of wisdom to share from this incredible journey you've been on with your brother after all these years?*

SANDRA: I would say just do the very best you can. You don't have to be the most talented, but be your authentic self and allow God to use you. There's a purpose for your life. That's what they need to know—that God has a purpose. I did not understand why my brother left when he did; but God would not have just sent him off like this and say, "Okay Sandra, hop

on one foot." God has put people around me in prayers who are holding me up and carrying me, and I believe that the best of my life is yet to come. He's not dead because if he was dead, he wouldn't be with Jesus. He's alive, we just can't see him, but he is alive and that's what makes me happy. [CCM](#)



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SANDRA CROUCH!**

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WF

BUILDING
UPON A
STRONG
FOUNDATION

BY MATT CONNER



THIS MAY BE NF'S FIRST GO-AROUND, BUT THE MICHIGAN-BORN RAPPER IS BEGINNING THINGS ON HIS OWN TERMS—STARTING WITH HIS FIRST NATIONAL RELEASE ON CAPITOL, *MANSION*.

Mate Feuerstein's transparency is the first thing you notice, whether talking in person or listening to his new album, *Mansion*. The man who performs as **NF** says he really has no choice. It's either let it out or bottle it up.

The charisma and energy that pour out on tracks like "Wake Up" and "Mansion" come from sincere, broken places of pain and anger, hope and redemption. Feuerstein speaks (and raps) openly about his own past of hurt and abuse as a child in Michigan and his struggle to continue to deal with such trauma, even as an adult. Even so, he's committed to telling his story for the power it holds to relate to others.

"What I want people to take from my music is that they'd be emotionally moved," says Feuerstein. "It is real life, and I'm talking about things that are currently bothering me or that I'm struggling with. So I want people to hear that and know that they're not the only person going through something. There are so many kids, and people of all ages, who think they're alone. But I've got this outlet that God has given me to talk about it, and I hope that others can feel the same thing."

NF is the latest signing for Capitol Christian Music Group, and arguably the most dynamic in some time. That's quite a statement for such a loaded roster; but the immediate comparison when listening to NF spit emotional verses is that of powerhouse star Eminem—Midwestern connection not withstanding but certainly for style and impact. Even Feuerstein admits the

influence is easily discerned on several of *Mansion's* tracks.

"I was highly influenced by Eminem as a kid, which you can hear if you listen to the music," he says. "But I listen to all kinds of stuff. I listen to acoustic ballads. I listen to Adele. Drake has definitely been a favorite of mine lately. I've also been listening to Ed Sheeran—I'm a huge fan of his. I also like a couple tracks on the new Derek Minor album a lot."

NF's music will appeal to far more than hip-hop fans since there's a strong sense of melody flowing through *Mansion's* twelve tracks. The guest list also helps diversify the mix, especially Britt Nicole's appearance on the album's closing song, "Can You Hold Me?" But there's no doubt that NF is first and foremost a hip-hop artist who is at his best when delivering his story on his own terms.

Feuerstein admits he has been asked about label involvement by those around him, who wonder if being a part of a larger industry will force him to adjust. But he says Capitol has been very supportive and encouraging of who he is and what he wants to do.

"When they hit me up, I went in to do a showcase," he explains. "I said, 'Look, this is my vision. I've always wanted my music to reach beyond the Christian market.' I've never been a preacher type of artist. I've always been more inspirational, with a 'this-is-my-life' sort of approach. By doing that, it becomes a place for other people to relate, regardless of where they're at in life.

"They were so supportive of all of that. They let me do what I want to do. I'm not saying they haven't given any input; but they were pretty much saying, 'Make the songs, and then we'll talk about them.' They've been awesome to work with."

Feuerstein's love for hip-hop runs deep, going back to his childhood when the music provided an outlet for his emotions. It wasn't long before he learned he was more than just a fan as he began delivering his own rhymes over music via a karaoke machine.



"I had a lot of anger issues and things from the past that bothered me," he says. "When I was 11 or 12, I started listening to dcTalk, T-Bone and Grits. At first I was a listener and then wanted more, because I realized it gave me a sense of relief. When I was 13 or 14, I started writing a lot; and then as I got older, it just kept on growing. And it grew fast.

"I actually started freestyling on a karaoke machine," he continues. "Basically I'd have my friend burn an instrumental, and then I'd play it through there on one mic, and then I'd rap on another mic to record on the tape player. That's what I started doing."

NF laughs when asked about his earliest compositions. It was less about structured songs and more about rapping impromptu rhymes based on beat and feel. Still, he remembers them enough to know they weren't any good.

"Those raps just sucked," he says with a laugh. "There's no way to explain it. But I can feel that way about what I was doing even

a few years ago. You can change so much in such a short amount of time. You can go from this immature person trying to find your sound to suddenly feeling complete."

It's that last line that describes best how Feuerstein feels today. He says he's an artist who's finally found his voice, one that's meant to share his story openly and freely with the world. While he hopes for good things on the new album and in his career, he can only control the story he's been given; and he's focused solely on that.

"I really hope that people see and hear me for who I am—I hope they take me seriously. I hope the album does well. Obviously I'd like to sell some records and hope it charts and all of that. But that will all work itself out. I can't focus on that. I'm here to focus on the music and what God has put on my heart to share with others". CCM



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THEY ARE HERE

The Multi-Talented **I Am They** Arrive From
Humble Beginnings And Extend The
Invitation For All Of Us To 'Be The They'

BY MATT CONNER



Gardnerville, Nevada isn't exactly a worship music hotbed. Neither are Indian Hills or even the much larger Carson City for that matter. Nevada, as a whole, continually ranks among the most unchurched states in the nation.

The lack of larger churches in the Lake Tahoe region in Western Nevada is an important point to the story of **I Am They**. After all, if it wasn't for the lack of substantive and engaging worship gatherings in the area, the new six-piece collective might have never formed. Born out of a need for a community-wide worship gathering, eventually named Solomon's Porch, I Am They are now bringing their inventive folk-pop sound to thousands each night. But their beginning came from the most unlikely place.

"The entire area that we've come from has been so excited that there's something coming out of it," says vocalist **Stephanie Kulla**. "There's such a small church culture in that area, so people are just really excited. They really believe in our ministry and bringing people together. We want people to feel just as much a part of our band as we are—as I Am They."

If you're new to the music of I Am They, just give it time. Currently they're opening proceedings on the popular Rock and Worship Roadshow Tour, which features heavyweights like MercyMe, Crowder, Jamie Grace, Matt Maher, Tedashii, Group 1 Crew and more. For a brand new band making their debut, it's an ideal outlet to quickly develop a following.



"The artist line-up on this tour is phenomenal, and they're all big heroes of ours," says Kulla. "I mean David Crowder, Matt Maher, MercyMe and the others are all just amazing. It's just such an honor to share the same stage as them. Then the platform to be able to lead so many people into worship and for people to hear our songs nationally as opposed to just the West Coast, which is where we're from, has been really surreal for us."

The heartbeat of I Am They fits perfectly within the tour's mission as they open the night with a worshipful set. While their new self-titled album isn't necessarily a congregational worship album a la Hillsong or even Leeland, each of the six band members—**Adam Palmer** (vocals, guitar), **Matthew Hein** (vocals, guitar), **Kulla**, **Justin Shinn** (keys), **Bobby Stiehler** (bass) and **Sara Palmer** (drums)—are rooted in worship music in both passion and experience. It's that deep commitment to minister through music that brought them together in the first place.

"Worship has always been and will always be our heartbeat," says Kulla. "We'll always be worship leaders. When we're home, we're all worship leaders at our home churches, but our music isn't necessarily 'worship music.' It's something that has influenced us. In the Christian music industry, it's like you're either going to be a worship artist or CCM artist, but while we walk down the CCM road, we can have worship songs on our album."

The transition from worship leaders to performing artists came quickly for I Am They, and the band earned spots opening for Chris August, Bebo Norman, Matthew West, Big Daddy Weave and several others. Then came Spirit West Coast music festival, where the sextet entered a battle of the bands competition and won over 72 others. The prize was \$500 to go to Nashville, a recording session with Whiteheart's Billy

Smiley and an appearance on the main stage at next year's festival.

Once they made their way to Smiley (after a fundraising concert to acquire the additional money needed to get to Middle Tennessee), it wasn't long until the producer started spreading the word about I Am They. Several labels were interested, but Provident Music Group won out in the end. Months later, producers Jason Ingram and Jonathan Smith helped wrap a bow around a self-titled production that blends the band's four-on-the-floor leanings with pop radio appeal.

"It's interesting for us in that we all write for the band, so we all have different musical influences," says Kulla. "I think it contributes to the way that we sound. We're all very different. For me, I grew up listening to a lot of Ray Charles and Aretha Franklin. Adam and Matt used to be an acoustic duo, so they love Punch Brothers and a lot of the acoustic, intricate kind of stuff.

"I like to compare it to how the Bible speaks of three strands bound together that are unbreakable. It's that idea that all of our different influences brought together create our sound. And as a worship band, we were doing a lot of Leeland and Hillsong songs when we started, so those influences are there as well."

Even as the band begins to grow their fan base with the Rock and Worship Roadshow Tour, they're already taking notes from available touring vets about how to handle road life and learning important lessons from living in the spotlight.

"Getting the time to talk with these artists and share war stories and perspective on things has been huge for us," says Kulla. "It's great to get knowledge from these guys on music, ministry and family. It's hard. It's an intricate lifestyle with a hard balance, so it's been great to glean that wisdom while



hanging out and spending time with them.

“For the family thing, it’s about balancing that with ministry,” she continues. “We’ve had people tell us how important it is to just be home when you’re at home. Don’t work on band stuff when you’re there, but rather focus your attention and time on family, because that time is sacred and precious and it’s few and far between when you’re touring regularly.”

I Am They are also getting some encouragement as the rookies on tour. While others are able to sleep from city to city in comfy tour buses, I Am They are earning their legs on the road in a van behind everyone else.

“Since we’re a new band and doing the van thing, you could say that we’re roughing it as opposed to sleeping on a tour bus or something, but everyone has been so encouraging in reminding us that it will get better,” says Kulla with a laugh. “Everyone is encouraging us and said they’ve been through the same thing for ten years or whatever. It’s just about putting in the time and they encourage us to stick with it and not give up.

“Even still it’s been awesome,” she continues. “It’s a whirlwind, you know, because we’re following a bus tour, so the scheduling is a little crazy because we are in the van. We’re driving when everyone else

is sleeping, but the whole tour has been so much fun. We're having a blast."

If there's anything the band wants fans to know about them, it's all found in their name. Kulla laughs when describing the name, since most people do a second take upon hearing it—she says it's not only Biblical but core to understanding their message and mission as a team.

"It's not grammatically incorrect," she laughs. "We may be from Nevada, but we know what we're doing. We use our name to explain it. I Am They gives us a chance to explain our platform and explain our hearts and our ministry—a unique way to connect with people. The name comes out of John 17:16 specifically where Jesus is praying for his followers and referring to them as 'they,' saying that 'they would be not of the world just as I am not of the world.'

"We want to identify as disciples of Christ. I want to be that and live that life. We want to encourage people to be included—to personify it, take it further and take people into our ministry with us. That's the thing that we're able to talk about."

Even as their fame spreads and the platforms get even bigger, Kulla says that the band's goal will remain exactly the same night after night—to share the gospel from the stage and then remain as long as necessary off the stage where she says real ministry happens.

"Our goal is to be genuine and humble," says Kulla. "It would be easy to get into that rock star mentality and just come in, play our set and then leave but our mentality is that we want to connect with everyone. We treat every venue like it's a church and we want to go meet the pastor and develop relationships with those people.

That's how ministry really begins to happen. We might get to say something from



A grand collision of folk and worship, **I Am They** bursts forth with a lively and intricate debut album. With tinges of bluegrass on the songs "We Are Yours" and "Even Me," the band showcases their versatility over the course of the album to expertly span the ground between folk, country, and modern worship. The softly lilting, "Amen" is both simple and intricately crafted featuring a string arrangement layered perfectly with a strong vocal performance.

—Grace Aspinwall

Album review from CCM Magazine, Feb. 15, 2015

the stage, but real ministry happens off the stage. We want to sit down after the show and talk to people, just being present and sharing God's love with them. You can say whatever you want behind a microphone, but for us it's really about integrity." CCM



FOR MORE INFO VISIT IAMTHEYBAND.COM.

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A hand is shown hovering over a glass of dark liquid, possibly alcohol. In the foreground, an orange pill bottle is tipped over, spilling white and yellow pills. The background is slightly blurred, showing a green bottle and a white label.

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CHRIS AUGUST

The Maker (Fervent Records)

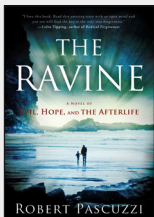
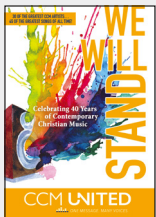
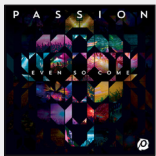
FOR FANS OF: Matt Wertz, Steven Curtis Chapman, Brandon Heath

★★★★☆

There's a distinctly personal feel to Chris August's new album, but he retains his signature pitch-perfect pop sound on *The Maker*. There's the fun and upbeat love song, "I'm in Love with You," and the radio-ready "Just the Same," which utilizes strong songwriting and melodies. "Muddy Waters" harkens back to his more soulful roots (seen clearly on his last record), and this organ-heavy tune nicely rounds out the collection. "Paradise" feels akin to many of singer/songwriter Matt Wertz's songs, and the songwriting and piano meld together in perfect measure. The only faltering, "Drop Your Stone" relies on quite a bit of cliched songwriting and an underwhelming melody line, but it's a minor fault on such a tightly woven project. It concludes with "Something," which is the best showcase of his subtle maturation, with more tonal control and a smart and graceful arrangement to go along with it. Overall, yet another incredibly strong and diverse project from Chris whose vocal just continues to be exquisite.

—Grace S. Spinwall

IN THIS ISSUE



WE LIKE: "Just The Same"



PASSION WORSHIP

Even So Come (sixsteps)

FOR FANS OF: Chris Tomlin, Crowder

★★★★☆

Passion worship events impacts millions of college students on a global scale while also creating a generational legacy of worship releases. The songs of Chris Tomlin and friends are sung every Sunday on every inhabited continent, and that legacy continues on *Even So Come*.

Recorded at Passion events in Atlanta and Houston, thousands of gathered worshippers sing along to the latest gems from Tomlin, Crowder, Kristian Stanfill, Christy Nockels and newcomer Melodie Malone. Title track, “Even So Come,” opens the ceremonies with a hymn from an expectant bride, but it’s Crowder’s “Lift Your Head Weary Sinner (Chains)” that sparks a set with a swampy electric vibe.

—Matt Conner

WE LIKE: “Lift Your Head Weary Sinner (Chains)”



JONATHAN THULIN

Science Fiction (Dream Records)

FOR FANS OF: Maroon 5, Group 1 Crew, Royal Tailor

★★★★☆

On his third studio project, Sweden-born/Nashville-based Jonathan Thulin ups the artistic and collaborative ante, turning in an intellectual batch of pop, rock, rap and R&B with several familiar friends. Meant to challenge believers to take their faith further and provide hope to pretty much anyone, *Science Fiction* has the potential to give the critically acclaimed singer/songwriter widespread attention. Besides his own beat-centric grooves and cinematic ballads, Thulin also explores the rhythmic rap of “Jekyll and Hyde” (with Rapture Ruckus), the alternative pop grandeur of “Mockingbird” (featuring Kevin Max & Shine Bright Baby) and the dance floor ready “Compass” (accompanied by Manwell of Group 1 Crew). Other guests include Moriah Peters, Derek Minor and Tauren Wells of Royal Tailor, adding further all-star appeal to Thulin’s already promising career.

—Andy Argyrakis

WE LIKE: “Mockingbird”
(featuring Kevin Max & Shine Bright Baby)

**NF**

Mansion (Capitol CMG)
 FOR FANS OF: LeCrae, Drake,
 Eminem
 ★★★★★☆

Raw, gritty, and enigmatic, this project from the ultra-talented newcomer NF, is an impressive effort. The young artist, drawing comparisons to Drake and Eminem, sings and raps with both passion and creativity. The title track, *Mansion*, could easily slide in a Top 40 radio spot, with his slick songwriting, and modern arrangements. He is an artist to watch, and brilliance is sure to follow this beautiful, sometimes dark, and vulnerable project.

—Grace S. Aspinwall

WE LIKE: “Mansion”



AMONG THE THIRSTY
Who You Say I Am (BEC)
 FOR FANS OF: The Afters,
 Tenth Avenue North
 ★★★★★☆

BEC Recordings' latest signing is Among The Thirsty, a veteran band who've released several independent offerings and endured some line-up changes before finding a home for their straightforward pop/rock appeal. Fans of The Afters or Tenth Avenue North will especially enjoy the songs on *Who You Say I Am*, which are tailor-made for radio play. Lead single “Completely” is definitely a highlight, but “Never Leave You” shows the quartet at their most memorable.

—Matt Conner

WE LIKE: “Never Leave You”



MATT MAHER
Saints & Sinners
 (Provident Label Group)
 FOR FANS OF: Crowder,
 Matt Redman, Chris Tomlin
 ★★★★★☆

Inspired by last century's giants of the Christian faith like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mother Teresa, Matt Maher gives listeners yet another thoughtful collection split between personal and worshipful morsels. The singer/songwriter also uses this fifth studio disc to expand his artistic chops, co-writing with Switchfoot's Jon Foreman, Needtobreathe's Bo and Bear Rinehart and Leagues' Thad Cockrell (amongst others), all united by the contemporary pop meets organic production of prior collaborator Paul Moak (Third Day, Mat Kearney).

—Andy Argyrakis

WE LIKE: “A Future Not My Own”

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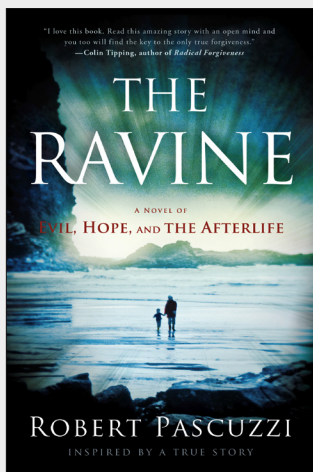


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THE RAVINE: A NOVEL OF EVIL, HOPE, AND THE AFTERLIFE

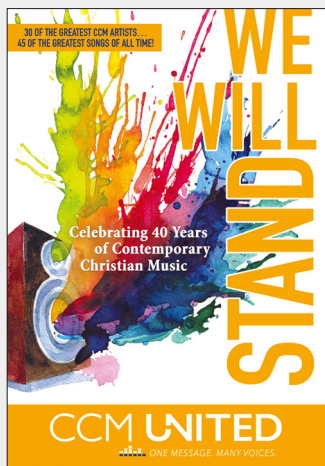
Author: Robert Pascuzzi

Publisher: Hope Messenger, LLC

★★★★☆

This powerful novel has been compared to *The Shack* but is more along the lines of a true crime read than a spiritual experience. The way the story's tragedy, a murder, weaves the lives of the people affected is where the story thrives. The book takes us backwards through the events and betrayals that happened before the crime, a la the movie *Crash*. Due to a somewhat sluggish dialogue-laden mid-section, the ending seems a bit rushed—but this story of forgiveness is a beautiful message of the light that hope can carry into the depths of darkness.

—Grace Aspinwall



WE WILL STAND

Various Artists

Exclusively available: CCMUnited.com

★★★★☆

It started as just an autobiography of the forty-year journey of music industry veteran Stan Moser, and grew into what culminated in the greatest assemblage of artists on one stage in the history of CCM—the likes of which we may never see again. Good thing Moser and his team brought over ten high-definition cameras to record the happening! This live-to-DVD experience, with special guest Roma Downey (*The Bible, A.D.*) and hosts Mark Harris (4Him) and Jaci Velasquez, is full of highlights from an evening of memory making. We especially enjoyed Michael Tait's (Newsboys) Jagger'esque improvs with Sandi Patty, Michael W. Smith, and Russ Taff—and cried to Evie singing Andrae Crouch's "My Tribute (To God Be The Glory)" and Steven Curtis Chapman's acoustic version of "For The Sake Of The Call" while gripping Voice Of The Martyrs-sponsored images flashed on-screen. A must-see that you will watch time and time again.

—Kevin Sparkman



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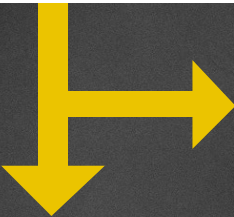
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