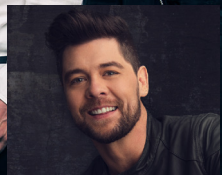


CCM



SIDEWALK PROPHETS

**BIG CHANGES BRINGING
NEW ATTITUDES
AND WHY DIFFERENT IS GOOD
WHEN CHRIST IS THE CONSTANT**



JASON CRABB
RIGHT WHERE HE
WANTS TO BE



**MERCYME'S
BART MILLARD**
SAVING STUDENTS
FROM PLAN B?

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FEATURES

SIDEWALK PROPHETS

The boys from Indiana embrace a season of change, and a shift in attitude, outlook, and sound as they unveil their third major full-length release, *Something Different*.



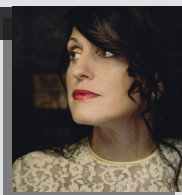
MERCYME'S BART MILLARD

Proving he's never too cool for school, the MercyMe front man takes his knowledge and passion for worship to college.



CINDY MORGAN

Recording artist and CCM contributor Andrew Greer sits down with his longtime friend, Cindy Morgan, for a candid conversation on music, writing and family.



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

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As we enter into fall—a new season—it’s another great reminder of the many “seasons of life” we experience. These don’t often occur in concert with weather patterns, rather, they are characterized by extreme joy, pain, blessing, sorrow and change. In this edition of *CCM Magazine*, we feature two artists who in recent times have faced changes, rediscovering in the process that Jesus Christ is truly constant.

A casual observer gazing upon the rising success of **Sidewalk Prophets** over the past year or two might assume that things were sailing along smoothly. However, after personal and professional hardships rippled through the band, it was their choice to cling to God’s steadfast presence that enabled them to embrace changes and emerge different.

James 1:17 (NLT) *Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow.*

Hebrews 13:8 (NLT) *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*

Change is nothing new for college students. But for 170-plus undergraduates at **Grand Canyon University** set to begin a new semester, change will come with a deeper understanding of effective worship leading. **Bart Millard** of **MercyMe** was so transformed by leading worship, that he is helping to change the lives of students called to similar pursuits.

Isaiah 43:19 (NLT) *For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness. I will create rivers in the dry wasteland.*



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.



Andrew Greer is a Dove-nominated singer-songwriter and writer. The Texas native and Nashville, TN resident recently released his first book, co-authored with Ginny Owens, titled *Transcending Mysteries* (Thomas Nelson). More info at Andrew-Greer.com.



Matt Conner is a music writer for the *Indianapolis Star*, *Relevant* and *Metromix* and the founding editor of StereoSubversion.com.

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1



COMPILED BY ANDY ARGYRAKIS

1 Worship duo **Brad + Rebekah** gathered ten musicians, songwriters and producers from Nashville, New York and Sydney for a trip to Uganda where they collectively staged a praise camp for children at Watoto Church (www.watoto.com). Pictured from left to right: Bellarive vocalist **Sean Curran**; **Rebekah and Brad Bichsel** (Brad + Rebekah); and Hillsong's **Hannah Hobbs**.

2 After playing to thousands on tour, **Switchfoot** front man **Jon Foreman** takes a break to busk in a more intimate sidewalk setting.

3 **Planetshakers Band** praise leader and Planetshakers Church co-senior pastor, **Sam Evans**, is pictured during an interview with GOD TV in Kansas City to talk about the significance of worship.



4 Singer-songwriter-worship leader **Mike Lee** is on the road all year supporting his new project, **All I Need**, including this side-stage moment at **Creation Fest**.

5 Preparing to release his first solo album on Reunion Records titled **Whatever The Road**, vocal powerhouse **Jason Crabb** stops by Salem Media Group's Nashville headquarters for radio interviews and this photo op with **CCM Magazine's** (L-R) **Shaun Helton**, writer **Barton Green**, and **Kevin Sparkman** (Photo: Aaron Crisler).



6 & **7** **Sidewalk Prophets** singer **David Frey** finalizes vocals on the group's brand-new record ***Something Different***, followed by the entire band setting up shop in a beautiful old plantation home to shoot the music video for the single "Prodigal."

6



7





THINK.

What do I believe?



ACT.

What should I do?



BE.

Who am I becoming?

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It's another thing to **LIVE IT.**

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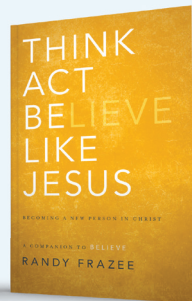
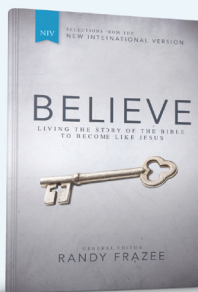
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DIFFERENT IS

IT'S A NEW DAY FOR SIDEWALK PROPHETS

BY CAROLINE LUSK



GOOD



DIFFERENT CAN BE TERRIFYING.

Different can also be great. But, to fully embrace *different* requires a certain measure of faith.

Sidewalk Prophets has faith in spades.

With the release of their first studio project in over three years, the band is now markedly diverse musically, a change reflected in the album title ***Something Different*** (Fervent Records, August 28, 2015). The group, comprised of co-founding members **David Frey** (lead vocals) and **Ben McDonald** (rhythm guitars), along with **Cal Joslin** (bass), **Daniel Macal** (lead guitars), and **Justin Nace** (drums), has experienced change due to growth in each members' spiritual walks—changes that unequivocally impacted the direction of their work as a band.

For Sidewalk Prophets, this story began with creative brokenness. After a challenging season, the band made a monumental transition to become self-managed, primarily under the creative direction of Ben McDonald.

"God isn't afraid to give us tests," McDonald says. "You learn so much about life through any circumstance and we are now emerging from the other side. We've weathered our storms to see what has remained, and from this we have refined and rebuilt. The superficial went away, leaving us with only Christ at our core. As Christians, there is that something different—it's the continual and underlying current of Jesus' grace."

With painful personal battles adding to the stress of professional changes, David Frey says he experienced a heavy-hitting reminder that his strength is found only in the Lord.

"Recently, I had an engagement fall through. In addition to that, my parents



had been going through a divorce. The circumstances shredded me and also rippled through to the band. However, I couldn't help but think about the fact that Jesus knew exactly what was happening and was holding on to everything from His eternal perspective. I was at a point at which I had nothing but Christ—the very place where He needed me to be.”

Through persistent resilience the band sustained, growing stronger through Jesus despite continued personal and professional struggles.

“We had to search for a perspective during some of our recent challenges,” Frey says. “We often wondered if we would ever recover from them, but God was constantly longing for us. Once we completely surrendered to that, we were in agreement that even though things seemed bleak, Christ was going to stand us up even stronger than before.

“We had to latch on to our faith, and be reminded that God is in control and does work all things for good,” he continues. “He’s the one giving us love when we feel unlovable. He holds the sky up when it feels like it’s falling

“GOD IS IN CONTROL AND DOES WORK ALL THINGS FOR GOOD. HE’S THE ONE GIVING US LOVE WHEN WE FEEL UNLOVABLE. HE HOLDS THE SKY UP WHEN IT FEELS LIKE IT’S FALLING DOWN. HE’S THE DIFFERENCE.”

— DAVID FREY



down. He's the difference. We want people to look at us, with all of our scars and mess, and think, 'Wow. I want whatever it is they have.'"

This focus on inspiring people and growing alongside of them is evident in their unwavering passion for human connection, McDonald explains. "The heart of this band has always been about connecting with people."

It was that hope of further connecting with their fans that drove Sidewalk Prophets to redesign their show structure, focusing on the audience experience and creating an intimate setting for every performance of their *Great Big Family Room Tour*. In a unique twist, every night each member of the band met concert attendees at the door and ushered them to their seats; over 20,000 of them total, according to McDonald. They shared pizza with the audience before getting on stage, and then continued to engage in dialogue

with them throughout the performance, even staying afterward to continue the conversation.

"The tour was an amazing risk," says McDonald. "We were traveling in our own van, getting stuck in a blizzard one day and heading to a beach the next. It was such an incredible and fulfilling journey. It was certainly something we had never experienced before, and we believe that it was a much different experience for audiences, too. It was worth the risks and we now want to invest more than ever into the people that we are connected with."

Riding the inspirational wave of their newfound creative freedom, Sidewalk Prophets was forming a vision for their new project, determined to honor God and the call he placed on their lives to rise above and stand out in their quest to share His message with the world.



"It had been three years since the last album [2012's *Live Like That*] and this one was in the works for over a year," says Frey. "We had been through so much as a band, when we were finally able to get away and rest with God, what came pouring out of us was different than anything we had done before."

They chose to get away to a beautiful lake house in Pennsylvania, which served as the perfect setting for much needed rest from their 200-plus annual tour dates, and helped in fostering ample inspiration.

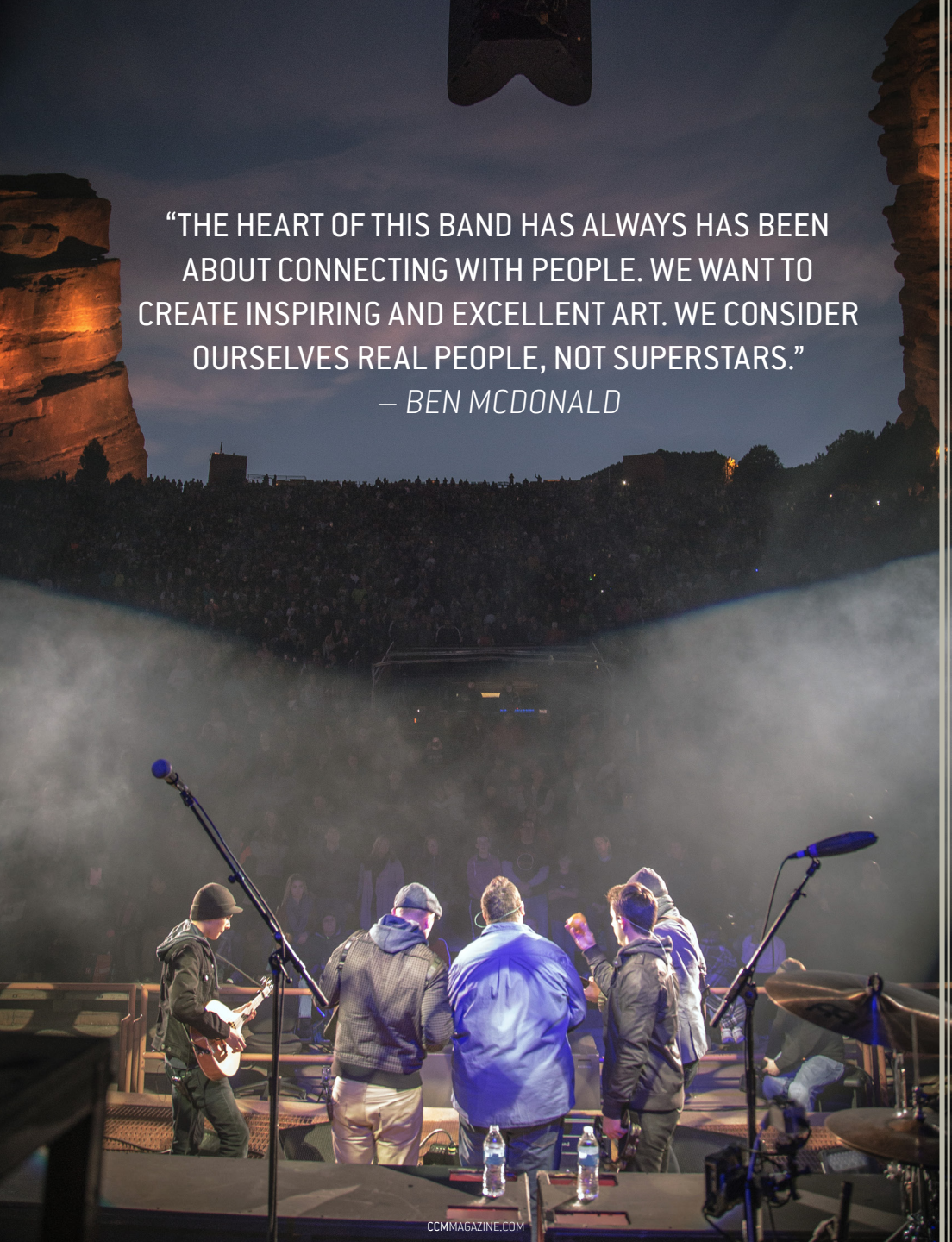
"We were on a wildlife preserve," Frey explains. "There were bald eagles and deer. It was so magnificent and really kick-started our time there. We put pen to paper every day. It was amazing to experience hearing from God when we finally stopped to listen for Him. We

had no cell phone service, and it was...*quiet*. Sometimes we can't realize how loud the world around us can be until we are in that type of environment."

For fifteen days, the 'Prophets soaked up the wonder of God's creation while simultaneously writing for the new project, inviting collaborators to fly in from Nashville and join in the process. **Seth Mosley** (for King & Country, Hawk Nelson, Jeremy Camp) was the last writer/producer to visit the lake house, and ultimately produced the entire project.

"We weren't sure if we were going to work with Seth. He is one of the busiest producers in Christian music today," says McDonald. "We initially thought that we wanted to go outside of the perceived boundaries of Christian





“THE HEART OF THIS BAND HAS ALWAYS HAS BEEN ABOUT CONNECTING WITH PEOPLE. WE WANT TO CREATE INSPIRING AND EXCELLENT ART. WE CONSIDER OURSELVES REAL PEOPLE, NOT SUPERSTARS.”

— BEN MCDONALD

music—even considering what others might think of our band’s potential—but we were blown away by him.”

What emerged with Mosely was an eclectic group of songs that stand alone from track to track.

“Comprehensively, *Something Different* is a sonic departure from anything we have ever offered,” McDonald says. “There’s a gospel influence, songs that sound like they came from the 80s, some even have a Hawaiian feel...ukulele sun songs! There’s a built-in journey from track one, all the way through to song number 14. They tell a story, and the artist in me knows that story will be different for each listener.”

In their effort to reach people in an unforgettable way, for *Something Different* the band drew inspiration from some of their favorite albums.

“One of our all-time favorites is [dcTalk’s] *Jesus Freak*,” Frey shares. “We also love *Take Me To Your Leader* [Newsboys] and *Jars of Clay*’s debut album. Those bands put their heart on paper. The songs were so honest and inviting—and so *different*. If you didn’t like a particular song, you’d keep listening and find one that you did. On *Jesus Freak*, you could bang your head to one track and be moved to bang on the next song.”

Included in the batch of new songs are the stories of people from around the country, all of which helped to shape and color the creative process on *Something Different*.

“Night after night on tour, people would ask us to pray for a child who had wandered from home,” Frey explains. “Others would admit that they themselves had been lost, but the words in our music were enough to inspire a return home and ask for forgiveness. The song, ‘Prodigal,’ draws upon the story in Scripture about two brothers. One was responsible, and one was not, but

the irresponsible one was welcomed home with joy and love. The greatest part of this story is the father. He is so full of joy that his son was finally home. There’s absolutely no reason to stay where you are if it’s not a good place. The same feet that took us to wander can lead us back home. You never know what might happen tomorrow, if tomorrow were to even transpire. Now is the time to be where you were meant to be—home.”

The song “Sisters And Brothers” was largely inspired by the interaction they had with people along the way.

“We really want to be a family with our brothers and sisters in Christ,” says Frey. “Our fans are more than just ‘fans.’ The lake house where we wrote this album belongs to, and was generously shared with us by, a fan that wanted to offer a creative space for us. These people genuinely care about what happens with this ministry. We aspire to give that degree of care and love to everyone we meet.”

With *Something Different*, the guys are preparing to hit the road with **Tenth Avenue North** for a fall tour.

“Once again, our audience will hear and see ‘something different’ from us on this tour,” says McDonald. “I love how entertainment can be used to glorify God. We want to create an environment where people can get lost inside the music and contemplate the greatness of Christ.

“This is a new season,” he continues. “**TobyMac** recently encouraged us, ‘You guys are carrying the torch. You need to bring it.’ That conversation was a game changer and continued stoking the fire for us to really love, connect, and engage with people on an entirely new level.”

This new perspective has refreshed and motivated them to elevate their vision and fully consider the impact their efforts may have on future generations.



“Everyone is going to face challenges and make mistakes in life,” says McDonald. “Trust is earned, and can then be burned. Our hope, however, is that the fruits from our fallouts will speak for themselves. We want to inspire others to rebuild, not settle.”

As far as Sidewalk Prophets are concerned, complacency has no voice. Through it all, they have maintained the intangible that makes life possible—faith.

“Upon finishing an album, finalizing the packaging and calling it a day, we usually don’t go back and listen to it,” admits Frey. “But in the case of *Something Different*, I’m finding

myself drawn back to it. Each song has a personal and special story. God was breathing into us.”

Each new breath brought about change—differences that were true blessings, granted by the One who remains the same. CCM



READ OUR REVIEW OF *SOMETHING DIFFERENT* IN THE AUGUST 15, 2015 EDITION OF CCM MAGAZINE.

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THE ART OF Marsh



Grand Canyon University is raising up a new generation of worshippers

BY CAROLINE LUSK

The commencement of the 2015-16 school year marks the return of several students entering their sophomore year in the innovative **Center for Worshipping Arts at Grand Canyon University.**

In addition to everything that a new session of classes can bring, these particular undergraduates are getting a unique chance to experience the fruits of a project they accomplished as freshmen with the release of the Center's first EP, ***Canyon Worship.***

With a clear commitment to keeping up with changes in technology, society and the ever-changing music industry, Grand Canyon University is at the forefront of developing a new generation of Christian music professionals. Housed in GCU's School of Theology, the program extends the concept of worship training far beyond the music...which is exactly what the inaugural program director, **Bart Millard**, had in mind.

"We are committed to not losing focus on who these students are in Christ," he says. "These students will walk away with a bachelor's in theology alongside their working knowledge of the music industry."

Front man of one of the most successful Christian bands in history, **MercyMe**, Millard approached GCU with the idea of creating curriculum that



Bart Millard

realistically prepares students for a career in the industry. Impressed with the idea, the university invited Millard to direct and develop the program, himself.

“One of my initial goals was to begin changing the mindset of incoming freshmen. I didn’t want this program to serve as another safety net or Plan B for students in the event that a music career doesn’t work out,” he explains. “Rather, I wanted to see a school that tangibly equips them with the tools they need to succeed in the industry. Business, marketing and social media are not traditionally part of a music degree, but they’re vital to your future as a recording artist or a musician in your church.”

The *Canyon Worship* EP is one indicator the program is doing the kinds of things it set out to do. The hands-on experience of

creating a record from start to finish is a practical application of the curriculum and just one example of the kind of educational opportunities the program offers. **Desiree Aguilar**, who recently completed her first

year in the program, one of the students featured on *Canyon Worship*, quickly discerned that this academic venture was a rare and precious opportunity.

“First, I am surrounded by teachers and staff who love God. They desire to see each and every student come out of the program with a strong biblical foundation and a heart completely on fire for true spiritual worship,” she says.

Obviously an enticing opportunity

for prospective students, the chance to record alongside a musician like MercyMe’s Millard would be a treat even for the most established artist.



Desiree Aguilar

"My experience with Bart [Millard] was a privilege, for sure," shares Aguilar. "I have been a fan for many years, and was honored that he would sing background vocals on my song. But of course, that is the type of guy he is—kind and humble, and has such a heart for worship. I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to collaborate with him. And by the way, have I mentioned...*that dude can sing!*"

Committed to the success of both the program and its students Millard remains very involved throughout the academic year.

"I'm on campus about twice a month," he says. "I often invite different people from Nashville who have experienced music and the industry the hard way to speak or provide some mentoring. I just love to spend time with the students. I pour my heart into the songwriting summits that take

place on Monday and Thursday nights. We have a Bible study and then break out into various writing sessions. I'll sit in with each of the groups and attempt to offer whatever insight I might have."

The hands-on collaboration is a hallmark of the program, allowing students to grow at an unprecedented pace.

Aguilar adds, "The students are very talented, and I consider myself blessed to be one of them. It is exciting to write songs with other people who love God and express that love the same way I do." She continues, "Iron sharpens iron, and there is definitely some of that going on here. We are becoming better musicians, songwriters and worshipers every single day. God is using this program to mold the next generation into the type of worshipers He desires, and this world needs."



Considering that last year's inaugural class began with just fifty students, the 170-plus students entering the 2015-16 class as Worshipping Arts majors is both a sign of the program's early success and proof that there are talented young people eager to learn and serve. From the world-class facilities to the operation of a student-run record label, GCU is offering undergraduates an opportunity to develop skills that most musicians don't gain until they have been thrown into the sink-or-swim reality of the "real world."

Maddison Harris, a current sophomore, shares, "I couldn't have imagined a better freshman year. I am blessed to be a part of this incredible program. It perfectly mixes Christian music industry with studies of theology and the heart of worship,



all culminating in a community with the next generation of worshippers and artists."

For Millard, the program is everything he envisioned and more.

"When I was in school, college was my 'Plan B,' my option in case music fell through," Millard recalls. "But I have no desire to spend my time or effort in a backup plan. This

program gives students a chance to have an incredible experience in an amazing facility. We want to equip those behind the scenes as much as those who are on stage. We want to champion the calling these students have and, in so doing, advance the Kingdom in any way possible." CCM

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CINDY MORGAN

The Heart of a Songwriter:
A Conversation
with Andrew Greer

In the lofty circles of the musical mecca that is Nashville, Tennessee, **Cindy Morgan** is one of the art form's most sought-after songwriters.

Her poetic verse-and-refrain penmanship has fashioned a rich discography of bestsellers resulting in twenty-two number one hits, twelve Dove Awards and multiple GRAMMY nominations. While collecting these personal accolades, Morgan has also been at work aiding the song catalogues of a broad range of other artists, from **Francesca Battistelli** and **Mandisa**, to **Glen Campbell** and **Rascal Flatts**, to **Natalie Grant** and **Amy Grant**, as well as a host of film and television shows. Throughout her twenty-year tenure in Music City USA, Cindy's affective songwriting has contributed to the crafting of songs, influencing hundreds of records all while inspiring millions of lives. Including my own.

When I first heard Morgan's singer-songwriter gem, **Listen**, as a budding middle school musician in the mid-90s, I was instantly captivated. Growing





up in the church, I had been exposed to a plethora of gospel music. Some good. Some not so great. But the poetic vulnerability inside each lyric paired with entrancing hook-laden melodies was tangible proof that gospel music could be both painfully honest and ultimately hopeful. Simply put, her songs helped me remember life is *beautiful*.

I have personally experienced the privilege of creating, touring and collaborating with Morgan over the last few years in countless writing sessions and hundreds of dates on the road. Up close, I have discovered her magnetic heart that has fanned the flame of songs in her life for years, and touched our souls for a lifetime.

As she is set to release her stunning tenth studio recording, **Bows & Arrows**, it is once again my honor to sit down for a conversation with this young legend—to reacquaint all of us with a longtime friend, Cindy Morgan.

CCM: *Your first few records—the songs that first introduced many of us to your music—were synth-pop records. But your more recent catalogue and the obvious inspiration of Bows & Arrows is roots music. Even bluegrass. How is this reflective of the music that you grew up with?*

CINDY MORGAN: When I made my first record, pop music was what I was most interested in. Much like when you leave home, I think you find your own interests. I was looking for my own music. I loved the music of the 90s. But even then, if I heard someone play a mandolin or a dobro, I was spellbound and pulled to my childhood memories of country churches, dusty floors and old wood pews. Maybe even some snake-handling churches. Hiss. [Laughs]

CCM: *How did these folk and bluegrass elements surface in Bows & Arrows?*

MORGAN: First, through the writing. I wanted to approach the songwriting from a very folk and bluegrass storytelling style. I love songs that tell a story.

From a production standpoint, it was important to keep things simple and allow space for a single instrument to really shine. More often than not, the instruments that were being featured were from the bluegrass family. I was honored to have two world-class bluegrass and folk musicians on the record—**Viktor Krauss** on upright bass and **Sierra Hull** on mandolin. When you sit in the control room and listen to what they are able to execute with such ease and beauty, you suddenly realize why they are world-famous. They are spectacular musicians. And humble. Who knew such extraordinarily talented people could be so kind and gracious? It is quite inspiring.

CCM: *“Strong like steel / Fragile like a bird...” I was so moved by the title track, written for and about your oldest daughter, Olivia.*

MORGAN: This song was inspired by a moment in the summer when Olivia turned twelve. She was asking me questions about life, and boys...and kissing. I started to understand she was trying to grasp to a life of her own. Things that are true. The thing about your kids at that age, there are no filters. They just want you to be real and honest.

That summer, while we were walking in the meadow by our house before sunset, I looked up as Olivia and Savannah were running ahead of us. The sun cast shadows behind them. Olivia was wearing a yellow dress and the shadow of her legs seemed to stretch out for a mile. I felt this enormous lump in my throat. It was like the first tie of the apron was severed. That hurts as a mother—to let go. I have worked on this song for about three years. It was just so special to me.

“WE HONOR GOD WHEN WE AREN’T
AFRAID TO LET OUR BROKENNESS
SHOW THE HEART OF GOD.”

—CINDY MORGAN



Neither Olivia nor Savannah have heard it yet. I plan to play it for them this weekend!

CCM: *Your new book, **How Could I Ask for More**, is dedicated to the memory of your late father, Cova Morgan. What was his influence on your current calling and career? How has his passing affected you?*


MORGAN: I miss him every day. My dad loved music and I can never thank him enough for the kindness and support he showed me, not just as a daughter but also as a musician-in-training. He would lie on the couch in our log cabin for hours and let me play him poorly written, depressing songs on the old, out-of-tune upright piano because he knew how important it was to nurture [music and songwriting].

In his younger days, he sacrificed a potential career in country music to give us a stable childhood, but he found a way to live out his passion for music. My memories of childhood are filled with him and his musician friends rehearsing on warm summer evenings on the front porch and in our small living room in the winter. They would play county fairs, family reunions and small churches. On [Bows & Arrows], my dad's dear friend and bandmate, **Jerry Evans**, played pedal steel so beautifully. It was like I could feel my dad over my shoulder that day. I don't know if he was there, but it sure felt like it.

I will spend my life feeling so grateful to have had him as a father and as a friend. I think my siblings and all his friends would say the same thing; Cova Morgan was an exceptionally good man.

CCM: *In conjunction with the release of your new book, you re-recorded the song that inspired the title one of your biggest career hits—on Bows & Arrows with our friend **Andrew Peterson**. What convinced you to record the remake?*





“I FEEL LESS MOTIVATED TO WRITE ‘HITS.’ THE MINUTE SOMEBODY STARTS TALKING ABOUT WRITING A HIT, FIRST, THE EXACT OPPOSITE THING IS GOING TO HAPPEN, AND SECOND, THE MAGIC STARTS TO SEEP OUT OF THE ROOM. I JUST WANT TO BE A PART OF STORYTELLING AND WRITING WHAT IS MEANINGFUL.”

—CINDY MORGAN

MORGAN: The book brought about the idea to remake the song. The original was so simple, basically a grand piano and a 90s string pad, it was easy to take it in a very different direction. I wanted to ask an artist who was also a singer-songwriter and who felt like a kindred spirit in life and songwriting—bent. Andrew Peterson reminds me so much of **Rich Mullins**. I love his honesty and his tender heart for God and for others. You can just feel it when he sings.

One night I heard him play at a concert for **Under the Radar** (you know, you were there!), and it reminded me about *good* songwriting—writing that doesn't worry about radio ads or JPM (Jesus Per Minute), but just tells an honest story. He really inspired me to set the bar high for this record. I was incredibly honored for him to sing on the new version and am thrilled with his vocal on "How Could I Ask For More."

CCM: *I found this quote of yours on songwriting: "You've just got to take the risk, write your heart." How essential is transparency and vulnerability in songwriting? Is it difficult to expose your heart through song?*

MORGAN: I realize there are things people don't want to know. And you can definitely overshare. But you have to write with a lot on the line. If it doesn't cost you anything to write it, then it might not resound in a deep place with others.

I woke up in the middle of the night with no intention of writing the song on the record called "Unbroken." I don't know where it came from, but it was as if it was looking for me. There are a lot of layers. You can scratch the surface and find what you think it's about. I didn't measure my words. It was 3:00 am. I just let it come out. I guess that is when writing vulnerably is the best, when you just let it happen.

CCM: *So many of us in the current singer-songwriter landscape were mentored by the penmanship of your earlier records, and yet you continue to pen hits for so many of today's artists, in addition to continuing to make your own records. At the end of the day, what continues to motivate you to write, to perform, to record—to create?*

MORGAN: This is a fantastic question, and one I have been giving a lot of thought to lately. I love the opportunity to help an artist find their voice and discover a truth about God or life or even their own story in the process of writing a song. I deem it an honor to be a "writing guide" of sorts. Writing is so personal and I feel grateful to have precious things—stories, feelings and failures—spoken into the air I'm breathing

I feel less motivated to write "hits." The minute somebody starts talking about writing a hit, first, the exact opposite thing is going to happen, and second, the magic starts to seep out of the room. I just want to be a part of storytelling and writing what is meaningful.

Years ago, I made a vow to my Maker that I would use my gifts for Him. I have not always kept that promise, but these days it feels so important to honor that promise. We honor God when we aren't afraid to let our brokenness show the heart of God. I love writing more than any other profession I can imagine. I just don't want it to lose its beauty in an attempt to be commercially successful. **CCM**



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JASON CRABB
Whatever The Road
 (Reunion Records)

FOR FANS OF: Mac Powell,
 Casting Crowns, Darius Rucker

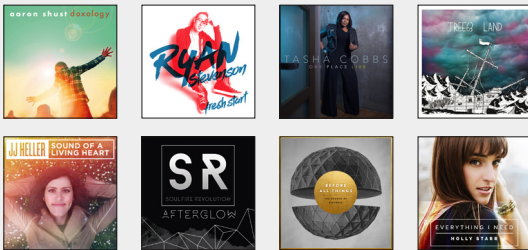
★★★★☆

Regarding his inaugural full-length release on Reunion Records, Jason Crabb states “I feel like it’s a little more of who I am than what I’ve been. It’s where I want to be, and it’s wonderful.” The album title, *Whatever The Road* is, of sorts, a statement of Crabb’s approach to his current musical ventures. However, he’ll tell you this really isn’t anything new; “I’ve never wanted to be pigeonholed—I just wanted to make music.”

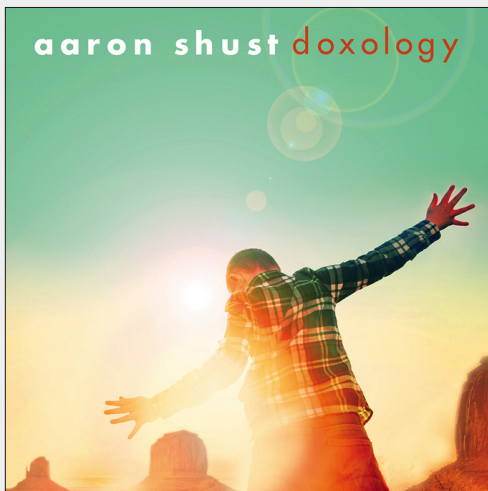
If he isn’t already considered so, Crabb’s latest project will firmly entrench him as one of Christian music’s go-to guys—transcending genre barriers. We certainly agree that the music is wonderful. Expertly pulling off the convergence of his award-winning vocals with new approaches in instrumental and production timbre, *Whatever The Road* provides an easy landing for both his established Southern Gospel fan base and those listeners who have never darkened the halls of a old-fashioned gospel sing-along. It seems the shoe fits, and Crabb will continue to collect many followers along the road, whatever direction he may go.

–Kevin Sparkman

IN THIS ISSUE



WE LIKE: “It’s a Good Life”



AARON SHUST

Doxology (Centricity)

FOR FANS OF: Chris August, Matthew West

★★★★☆

While the songs on Aaron Shust's latest album, *Doxology*, are rooted in solid theology and church tradition, they're also more festive and celebratory than the title might suggest. Thus, the combination of *Doxology's* grounded lyrics and towering melodies should make it a favorite within his catalogue for both personal and congregational listens.

"Always Will Be" and "It Is Finished" are polished pop refrains that speak to God's presence and power over sin, respectively. "Triumphant Conqueror" focuses on similar themes, and is a notable highlight near the album's end. However, the real musical gem lies in the mid-section, "Never Gonna Let Me Go." The subdued pop groove shines bright with a gospel flair and level of fun that is a welcome addition.

—Matt Conner

WE LIKE: "Never Gonna Let Me Go"



RYAN STEVENSON

Fresh Start (Gotee Records)

FOR FANS OF: Mat Kearney, Shawn McDonald, TobyMac

★★★★☆

Those in the know already regard Ryan Stevenson as a promising, hook-heavy singer-songwriter who broke big as cowriter of TobyMac's "Speak Life." Like many on the Gotee roster, Stevenson combines beat-driven acoustic pop, hip-hop and electronica to create a concoction that's musically trendy and topically relevant. Chances are, listeners have already caught the lead single, "Not Forgotten," a collaboration with Mac that's an ideal summary of Stevenson's sound. Yet it's the solo "All Yours" that boasts commitment to spiritually enriching lyrics together with its dusty guitar grooves and call/response chorus echoing his commitment to Christ. In fact, each of the ten tunes deliver when it comes to mouth-watering sounds and faith fortification, further positioning this relative newcomer as one of Christian music's sure-to-be stars of tomorrow.

—Andy Argyrakis

WE LIKE: "All Yours"

URBAN

**TASHA COBBS****One Place Live***(Motown Gospel)*FOR FANS OF: Kierra Sheard,
Anita Wilson

★★★★☆

Tasha Cobbs took the Gospel world by storm with her debut, *Grace*, which sat atop the charts for nearly two years and earned multiple Dove Awards as well as a GRAMMY. Suffice it to say, a lot of ears are waiting for *One Place Live*, Cobbs' passionate new release that features Jamie Grace and Kierra Sheard, among many others. From the opening fire on "Immediately" to the tender "Sense It," Cobbs' charisma and power continues to shine.

—Matt Conner

WE LIKE: "Put A Praise On It"

ROCK

**TREE63****Land** *(Fuel Music)*FOR FANS OF: Sanctus Real,
Kevin Max, U2

★★★★☆

For a band relatively inactive for seven-plus years, any sort of return should warrant a curious ear. But the delivery of Tree63's *Land* deserves nothing short of a ticker-tape parade. Expect a flood of enchantingly creative melodies and arrangements perfectly matched with the vocal acrobatics of front man John Ellis. In fact, the original trio remains intact on this triumphant instant classic. Standouts include the warring "Standing On It," melodic "The Storm," and reflective "Never Had A Winter."

—Kevin Sparkman

WE LIKE: "Standing On It"

POP

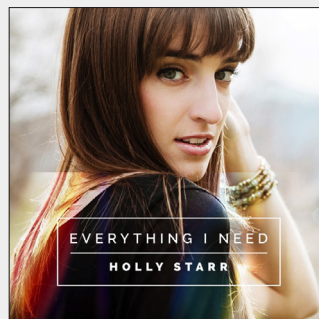
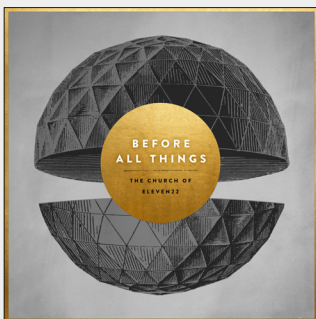
**JJ HELLER****Sound Of A Living Heart***(Stone Table Records)*FOR FANS OF: Christina Perri,
Audrey Assad, Laura Story

★★★★☆

It's impossible to be down when listening to JJ Heller. On *Sound Of A Living Heart*, Heller continues her proven formula of innocent melodies, heart-moving lyrics and inviting musical moments. Adeptly exhibiting the good in life, Heller's new batch skillfully encourages, from the glowing "Meant To Be," to the deeply spiritual "Holy Ground," to the lead single "Fully Known." The inspired "Father-Daughter Dance," featuring Sanctus Real's Mark Hammitt, brings out the best in Heller as a writer.

—Kevin Sparkman

WE LIKE: "Meant To Be"



SOULFIRE REVOLUTION

Afterglow (Dream)

FOR FANS OF:

Hillsong Young & Free

★★★★☆

Colombian worship band Soulfire Revolution was an instant hit in the U.S. with their debut, *Revival*. Their follow-up, *Afterglow*, will further establish them as a favorite among modern worship bands. These dance-hall-ready anthems are easily accessible and accomplish their purpose of ushering vibrant celebration. The wide emotional range of Hillsong's youthful releases are a good reference point for those who've not yet joined Soulfire Revolution for a worship session.

—Matt Conner

WE LIKE: "We Will Rise Up"

ELEVEN22 WORSHIP

Before All Things

(Self-released)

FOR FANS OF: Jesus Culture, Planetshakers, Hillsong United

★★★★☆

Before All Things, the third album from Florida-based Eleven22 Worship, is equipped with many potential corporate-worship standards. Most likely to wind up in a local Sunday setlist is the powerful "Locked Up Death." Soaring lyrically, the standout proclaims *Locked up death / Buried the key / Your grace pours out and covers me*. Musically, the album weaves a subtle path between worship genre favorites, the more memorable moments following the throwback trend of 80s-influenced synth pop.

—Jamie Walker

WE LIKE: *Locked Up Death*

HOLLY STARR

Everything I Need

(Artist Garden Entertainment)

FOR FANS OF: Kari Jobe, Plumb, Love & The Outcome

★★★★☆

Just 24 but already four projects into a recording career that's netted a pair of Top 25 singles (even as an indie artist), Holly Starr is clearly ahead of the curve throughout this latest melodic pop/contemporary Christian collection. Across seven tracks, the singer-songwriter shuffles between the personal and the praise-worthy with a newfound assurance, while production from Scott and Ed Cash (Chris Tomlin, Kari Jobe) helps further frame her gorgeous vocal range, perhaps best displayed on ballads like "My Father's Love" and "God Is."

—Andy Argyrakis

WE LIKE: "Never Going Back"



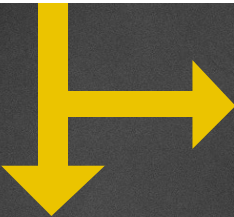
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