

RED TURNS 10 | SCHLITT & SMILEY FORM 'UNION'

# CEEM

## JASON GRAY

**OPEN WOUNDS,  
OPEN HEART**  
WHY HIDING WASN'T AN  
OPTION FOR HEALING



**TODD SMITH**  
CALLING ALL FATHERS



**THOUSAND FOOT KRUTCH**  
EXHALE = DEFLATE?

JUN 15, 2016

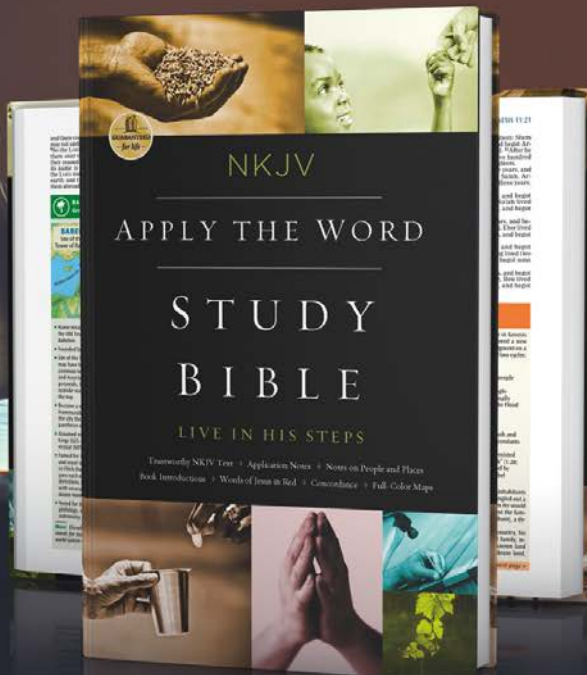
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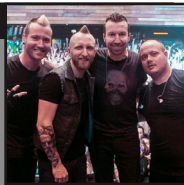
### Jason Gray

Why he wanted to hide when his marriage fell apart, and what God did to bring him face to face in dealing with his pain.



### Thousand Foot Crutch

After 20 years of successful album releases, is TFK's *EXHALE* a sign that the band is finally slowing down?



### Todd Smith & Selah

What shortcomings in Smith's own journey of fatherhood led to a recent call-out to Dad's around the world?



### Reviews

New music from: Cana's Voice, Mercy Mercy, Travis Ryan, Red + much more!



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**Calling ALL Fathers** | If you have a pulse, chances are you're both saddened and disgusted by the events that occurred in Orlando, FL early Sunday morning, June 12, 2016. I applaud those in the Central Florida area for putting aside any religious or political leanings in rushing to donate blood and provide aid. Of course, we should all be in prayer for the families of these victims, those that continue to suffer and recover from wounds that they be healed, and especially for our nation and its leaders—continuously.

The Bible tells us not to judge (**Matt. 7:1-5, Luke 6:37, John 8:7**)—and as a Christian, I must go forward in only examining my own life as I follow Christ's examples. Romans 2:1 (NKJV) says, *Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.* Those are some serious words, and I believe all of us are to take them very seriously.

On the heels of **Omar Mateen's** father releasing statements and conducting interviews in the wake of June 12's tragedy, I also look ahead for what is to come this Sunday—Father's Day. Although I have yet to experience the joys of being a father, as current events are blaring through my television I'm finding myself turning up the volume to **Todd Smith's (Selah)** new single, "Calling All Fathers." In perfect response to those New Testament commandments, Smith asks, *Where are the leaders?/Where are the teachers?/Where are the keepers of every home?*

His questions are valid, and as we try to wrap our heads around another senseless incident, they are poignant. But the admission of his own shortcomings is where Smith found inspiration for the song, "I can see a lot of great things I do as a father, but there are a lot of ways in a lot of areas where I don't feel like I measure up," he says. The struggle is real—I to want to place blame, I want to go online and offer my emotion-laden opinions in comment sections and on feeds, etc. ... But I've got to break that urge, as hard as that can be, and look inward ... Upward.

*We've fallen asleep and darkness has come/We will find strength in the name of Jesus/Calling all [fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, Christians...]/Wake up*



Blessings,

A stylized, handwritten signature of Kevin Sparkman in black ink.

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# Steve Hess & Southern Salvation

## CARRY THE MESSAGE

### Steve Hess & Southern Salvation

#### CARRY THE MESSAGE



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# OUT & ABOUT

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A close-up portrait of actor Jason Gray. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. He has short, dark hair and is wearing a white button-down shirt under a dark, textured blazer. The background is dark and out of focus.

# JASON GRAY



# Jason Gray—Open Wounds, Open Heart

No Stranger To Accolade Or Heartache, Jason Gray  
Learns To Let His Pain Bring Him Back To Life

By Caroline Lusk

We spend a lot of time alleviating pain. Whether it's a headache or a heartache, a lot of life is wrapped up in becoming pain-free. In our frenzied escape attempts, however, we often forget one of life's fundamentals. What better teacher is there than pain?

The heat tells us to take our hand off the stove.  
The stomachache tells us something's wrong...to get help.

The body was created to learn from and even be protected by pain.  
Why then should it be any different for our heart?

**Jason Gray** knows a thing or two about pain. So too does he know about lessons learned, broken hearts put back together one way or another, and how fresh wounds are sometimes just what the doctor ordered.

"There is a quote by **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** that I like about grief," shares Gray. "About how the pain is evidence of the goodness of what was lost, and in a way is a tribute, an ongoing and meaningful way we can honor and value who we've lost."

Just a brief review of Gray's last few records is ample evidence of such a tribute.

"Music has always been medicinal for me," he says. "I think that I've done a lot of grieving on my last two or three records. In this new season, I do have a sense of hopefulness that is freer to be

expressed. With the new project, I was excited to make a happier, more optimistic record, but at the same time, I want it to be a deeply rooted joy—rooted in reality. I want to make use of my experiences.”

His experiences are many. For nearly a decade, he fought to keep his marriage together, their family whole and his heart beating.

“I’ve often wondered how over half of people in marriages go through this and survive it. I didn’t know if I would,” he says. “I hear experts say the death of a spouse is very difficult, but if someone dies, you still get to keep the memories from your story. The story remains intact. One of the most significant things you lose in a divorce is your story. You don’t have access to it the way you used to. For all the people out there who have gone through or are going through a season in which you feel your memories, your life is co-opted by a sense of pain and loss and confusion. I have an understanding of what that feels like.

“Many years of that kind of pain is very disorienting. I did my best to be available to the possibility of reconciliation, but did so very imperfectly,” he continues. “No one can prepare you for the chaos of a family breaking down. It makes everyone involved insecure.”

More than once Gray’s personal feelings of renunciation and lack of security wound their way into lyric and verse. “Remind Me Who I Am” was a sincere outcry from a heart in anguish.

“I wrote that song out of my own experience of being afraid of being rejected by someone I was very close to and the way in which that revealed how much of my identity was wrapped up in that,” he shares. “It reoriented my sense of identity in a healthy way and in a way I hoped would contribute to the healing of our marriage.”

Careful to exclude words or scenarios that would explicitly posit the song toward or around his marriage, Gray achieved a sense of subtlety that neither pointed fingers nor accused. At the end of the day, though, while he was making personal revelations and was even seeing walls being torn down in the lives of others, the fragments of his own home was getting no closer to whole.

“Night after night people would come to me and tell me how one song or another would help them in their marriage,” he says. “It was beautiful and at the same time confusing. Why were the songs I was writing helping their marriages and not mine?”

Before long, the pain became a routine. Gray would leave to play shows on the weekends, taking the last flight possible and the earliest flight home, leaving his house at 3:00 a.m. to catch a flight.

“I was just exhausted, depressed and heartbroken. I would be picked up at the airport by some church and have to be whatever they needed me to be. We drove to the church, hauled in the equipment, went to meet everyone and then I would go to the green room, crumple on the floor, weep, pray...and then sound check, play a concert, sign some autographs, go to a hotel, crumple on the floor, weep and cry out to God. I devoted so much energy to my marriage being healed. I never prayed for something so hard,” admitted Gray. “It left me asking, ‘Does prayer work? Is God real?’ My belief was broken. My prayer was broken. My worship was broken.”

And at the end of the day, his marriage was broken. After eight long years of fighting and praying and hoping against hope, the marriage was over and he had to learn to live again.

“When the divorce was finalized, I was devastated, depressed, spent,” he says. “I was out on tour with **Big Daddy Weave**, which





was great. I just had to play 25-minutes. I thought, 'I can do that. I'll play my songs and go hide in my bunk for the spring.' My hope was to hide."

His hope was soon to be dispelled. The tour he counted on being a hiding spot and a sanctuary of sorts became a sanctuary of a very different kind—a confrontational form of healing he had neither planned on nor even believed was possible.

"Each night they would do an altar call and all the band and artists would go pray for people," Gray recalls. "I didn't know if I could do it. I didn't know if I even believed in prayer, but I thought that if God was moving in a given direction, I wanted to be in the path so I could get hit by something holy. I went down the first night, with no one knowing my story, and the people who found their way to me were couples whose marriages were falling apart because of reasons I understood. I knew how to pray for them and in that moment I felt God speaking to me, saying, 'I still have good work for you to do.' That was the beginning of my hope that all of this mess would be repurposed. I've sung that in my songs forever, but never really got it until that moment.

"I have a friend who says the songs know what's going on inside of you before you do. So many of the songs I've sung over the years went out ahead of me. I know there are a lot of people who have gone through divorce or loss or something that's turned them upside down. I feel better equipped now to love them and am excited to make use of that in my music."

That excitement isn't just lip service; it's contagious and it is tangible. At first listen, the timbre, beat, aura and approach of the new record, ***Where The Light Gets In***, doesn't even make sense. How could someone who has trudged through years of hell

produce an album that not only induces a sense of levity in the listener; it is genuinely saturated with a sense of optimism that isn't naive or cynical. It's an optimism that genuinely believes the sun will rise again because it has seen its share of sunsets, but on the heels of a glow that lies just over the horizon. Gray describes it best.

"Have you ever gone through something hard, and friends will check in and ask you how you're doing? At first it helps to talk about it, but after a while it can feel exhausting to have that conversation over and over again and you can get weary of talking about it," he says. "Not only do we worry about wearing our friends out with the ongoing saga, but it starts to wear us out, too. And you can reach a point where—even though you're still in the middle of it—you feel like you need to not talk about it and have new conversations. I'd say that is a pretty accurate description of the writing for this new record. I was still in deep grief but I needed to start having different conversations, hopeful and even light hearted ones."

Perhaps the greatest evidence of God's workmanship in the heart of this imperfect, but willing vessel, is that not only did Gray desire to have new conversations; he achieved it.

"I was thinking recently about how appropriate it is that my record ends with 'Thank You For Everything,'" says Gray. "I heard another quote by **Elizabeth Kubler-Ross**, that says, 'When you learn your lessons, the pain goes away.' I'd even say that at some point it's possible to look back on our pain and have some sense of gratitude for it—for where it led us, who it made of us, what it taught us. Our pain, loss and failure become our most significant teachers, I think. How do we learn to forgive unless we are hurt by someone? How do we learn courage unless we are faced with fear? How do we surrender to grace without desperately need-

Jason Gray

ing it first? **Richard Rohr** says that if we are not transformed by our pain we will transmit it. I want to be transformed, and even now I've begun to be grateful for the painful teachers in my life who are making me new." CCM



# TFK





# Thousand Foot Krutch—Just Breathe

Allowing God's Breath To Invade Every Detail, McNevan, Bruyere and Augustine—The Trio Known As 'TFK'—Are As Tuned-In As Ever After Twenty Years Of Making Music

By Matt Conner

"We feel like we're just getting started."

In some ways, **Trevor McNevan** sounds like a young man just beginning fulfill his dream of "making it" one day. In others, it's clear the **Thousand Foot Krutch** front man has been at this for quite some time.

Twenty years into a chart-topping career marked by well over a million albums sold, song placements all over television and video games, and a global fan base, McNevan has every reason to want to slow down. He's now a family man with a young son and a daughter on the way. In short, he's earned his stripes. Fortunately for TFK's fans, McNevan and company are not the sort to rest on their laurels.

"You'd think releasing another new album might get old, since we've been doing this for twenty years now, but it's still a new experience every time," says McNevan. "Now that we've had the record ready to go the last couple months, we're just chomping at the bit. I personally feel like this is our best record to date."

McNevan's "best record to date" description refers to **EXHALE**, the band's forthcoming set of summer anthems. TFK's last two albums, 2012's **The End Is Where We Begin** and 2014's **INHALE**, both hit No. 1 after their release, and it's fair to expect **EXHALE**

to do the same, especially since it's filled with the band's signature stadium-ready hooks. *INHALE*, the sister project, showcased a more delicate side, while their newest is ready to let it all out.

"The live show is such a big part of who this band is," says McNeven. "We've always put 150-percent out there while we're playing our music, and these songs will expand on that for sure. The more intense the music is, the more intense the live energy and fan connection will get. We're doing a headlining tour this summer, and we can't wait to get out there and share these new songs with people and connect face-to-face with our fans."

Hidden behind the fist-raising anthems and hard rock intensity is a very thoughtful band that continue to put themselves in tender, vulnerable places to write the songs that they do. Anyone well versed with the band's significant catalog will already understand this, as McNeven's songs have always given way to raw emotion and deeply personal experiences. It's rock, but it's relatable.

"There are a lot of real life moments on this record," says McNeven. "One song called 'Honest' is about a moment I've had so many times being transparent with God asking, 'How come I always break my promises to you? Why do I feel so far away from you? If I love you this much, why am I taking steps away?' There are a lot of raw emotions on this record, but that's the music that's always communicated with me."

McNeven gets personal on another song, "Lifeline," which finds him nearing the end of himself as he deals with anxiety for the first time.

"That song came out of some pretty intense moments in this last season of life for me," he says. "I was dealing with a few things I'd



never dealt with before. It was a feeling of being overwhelmed. We all hit those moments in different ways where you come to the end of yourself.

“As trying as those moments are, those are some of the most beautiful moments in our lives,” he continues. “You come to the end of yourself and you say, ‘God, I trust you. I can’t take another step. This is all you.’ God has had his hand out trying to get us to let go of control the whole time. As tough as it can be, it can also lead to a beautiful restart.”

The key to Thousand Foot Krutch’s longevity can be found in such vulnerable soil. To hear McNevan describe his creative process is to hear a man committed to staying close to the heart of his Creator. While other bands might burn out from going through the motions or become overwhelmed by the demands of a constant tour schedule, McNevan and the rest of TFK—bassist Joel Bruyere, drummer Steve Augustine—are as grounded as ever. When fame toward one direction or another does not faze you, twenty years isn’t such impossibility.

“The dynamics of making music is still the same after all of these years,” says McNevan. “You still spend a lot of time pouring your heart into the record itself. That’s something we take very seriously and it’s always a call out to God asking, ‘What do you want us to say? How do you want this to work?’ It’s such a process, both mentally and spiritually.

“When you’re in this industry and you’re in the grind or on a tour or heading to a bus or airplane or venue, you can get into this mode of busy-ness. That’s something we can all relate to, I’m sure. I know it’s important for me when pouring into a record to take out some quiet time, to set that aside and spend time in God’s presence. I don’t want to always ask something or talk at



God, but I also want to listen. I'm listening to what God wants to say and speak through this process."

Typically, what God wants to say through a Thousand Foot Krutch record comes directly from McNevan's personal experiences. Each album is filled with the Ontario, Canada native's personal experiences, and EXHALE is no different.

"On each record that you make, you're writing from your heart about situations that you've gone through," he explains. "EXHALE touches on some stuff that's very personal and close to my heart. Each record has that, so it's not different in that aspect, but this is a new chapter for me since I have a little boy and a little girl on the way. God has been teaching me new things, stretching me in new ways, and so the music is about all of that."

Staying spiritually grounded isn't the only practice that has stayed the same over twenty years in a rock and roll band. McNevan also says his creative process remains the same from album to album. It begins with a string of random ideas—musical or lyrical—written in notebooks or logged into a voice recorder of some type. From there, the songs take on a life of their own.

"Ideally, songwriting always starts the same way," he says. "I lock myself in the back of a bus or in a studio or in a hotel room and start digging in. I start thinking about what I'm inspired by in that moment. Perhaps it starts with a guitar riff or another instrument or a hook that comes to mind. I have crazy amounts of voice recorders filled with stuff through the years.

"So it starts by digging in to some of that stuff and seeing what inspires you. Then it takes a lot of crazy turns and twists from there. That's the fun of it is letting it out of the box. You want to serve the song—the style, the production, the message of the

song. So it starts the same every time, but I always end up in a whole new destination. That's the beauty of songwriting."

McNevan says he's serious about the "just getting started" feeling, but he also recognizes just how rare Thousand Foot Krutch's longevity really is. "We've seen a lot of great bands come and go. It makes you feel very fortunate to be doing what you're doing. A lot of bands seem to have a five-year of-sorts career window, so we feel very thankful to still have an audience walking with us. We're still doing this with the same heart we ever had, so we're just so grateful to that support."

Perhaps Thousand Foot Krutch can feel like they've got plenty of life left because they've never felt it was dependent upon them in the first place. McNevan recognizes God as the one who has



authored his musical career from the beginning, so who is he to change his mindset after this many years of making music.

“When it comes to making a record or writing a song as a believer, it’s all in God’s hands,” says McNevan. “It’s not as much my input as it is His. We try to keep it about that. Although you’re the voice, you’re really drawing on that. Sometimes it’s a couple years later or in the current moment, but the songs themselves will start to speak to me about my own life. It’s a cool process that way. It’s your record, but you give Him that glory and don’t take that ownership, that’s for sure.” CCM

[photo: Melissa Fox]







# TODD SMITH



# Todd Smith

## Calling All Fathers

**Todd Smith** is a singer-songwriter and founding member of **Selah**, one of Christian music's most beloved groups. Their nearly two-decade career boasts total sales surpassing 4 million album and single units combined; eight Gospel Music Association Dove Awards; and eight #1 singles.

Selah's hits include such signature songs as "You Raise Me Up," "Wonderful, Merciful Savior" and "Press On." Smith is married to best-selling author and speaker **Angie Smith** and they are the parents of five daughters: 13-year-old twins **Ellie** and **Abby**; **Kate** (10); **Audrey** (with Jesus); and **Charlotte** (6).

As Smith releases his most current single, a proclamation titled "Calling All Fathers," CCM Magazine wanted to take the opportunity to talk with him more about fatherhood, getting personal about his own admissions of parental flaws, and what the Smith family will be up to this Father's Day.

**CCM Magazine:** *You're honest that your own shortcomings as a dad helped inspire the song. In what ways are you now being more intentional to heed the words of your song?*

**Todd Smith:** Great question. I'm still trying to figure that out, but here are some practical things I'm working on:

**Be a man of my word.** If I make a promise, whether it's big or small, I try to keep it.

**Speak life.** I want to intentionally tell my kids how much I love them and how proud I am of them. I have always done this, but I need to do it more.

**Be in the moment.** Sometimes, honestly, I just want to focus on things that are about me or important to me. I have to stop and tell myself, “Be in the moment, pay attention!”

**Know them!** I’m not a horrible checked-out husband and dad. I love and adore my wife and kids, but I need to work more on knowing their hearts more deeply.

**Make them feel safe.** One of the greatest ways for me to connect with my family is to make them feel safe. It creates an atmosphere for them to thrive and their trust in me grows.

**Pay attention to their interests.** I have had a harder time connecting with my daughter Ellie. I think it’s partly her age, but also my lack of interest in things that are important to her. I’ve noticed a change as I’ve shown more interest and asked questions about things she loves. I’m trying to make what she likes important to me.

**Smile more.** I simply try to smile and laugh more and not take myself so seriously.

**Apologize.** One of the most powerful things I can say to my daughters besides “I love you” is, “I’m sorry, I was wrong. Please forgive me.” My kids need to know I’m a sinner in need of grace. Hopefully, that helps teach them to take responsibility for their own actions as well.

***CCM: How does being a God-guided father make a man a better leader in society?***

**TS:** Sometimes when I read the Gospels and listen to Jesus' teachings I think, "I don't even know who this man is." I'm saved, I believe He is God, but I am not emulating what He taught. I'm not living the way He said I should. When you start seeking the face of God you will naturally take on His attributes. Your character and heart turn from being inwardly focused to paying attention and desiring relationship with Him. It also makes us aware of one of the main reasons God created us—to love and serve others, and help equip them to be everything they have been called to be.

***CCM: The message of the song is powerful, and as an artist, you also know the power of music. How do you think music helps elevate a lyric like this? Does it make the message more accessible?***

**TS:** We have a huge responsibility as songwriters and artists to write Truth. Most people can't remember what their pastor preached about two weeks ago, but a three-minute song can remain on their heart for a lifetime. Music always makes the message more accessible. I have sung messages about Jesus in public places where I would never have been allowed to preach. I have sung things to strangers I would never be comfortable saying to them without a relationship first.

1 Corinthians 4:15 (EXB) says, *Even though you have 10,000 teachers, you do not have many fathers.* That's one the central messages of "Calling All Fathers." If we men will stand up, committed to believing in the Word of God, confessing our sin, humbling ourselves and walking with authority in Jesus, what a witness that will be in our community—and world—and what an impact it will have on our families.





***CCM: Father's Day is just around the corner.***

***How do you plan to celebrate the day with your family?***

**TS:** Have all the ladies I love focus on me! We will hang at the pool. We won't do a big meal, because I'm doing **Nutrisystem** with Selah. So far I've lost 30 pounds!

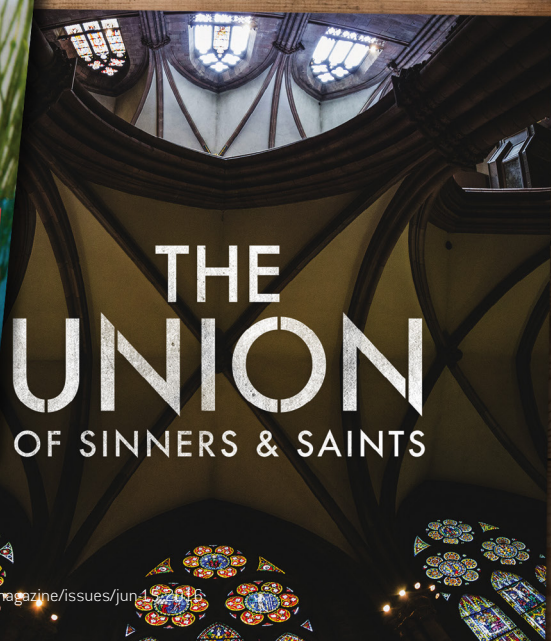
***CCM: How has your own father impacted you as a dad?***

**TS:** I have never doubted that my dad, **Jim**, loves me. He has always been proud of me. He loves Jesus and he has been faithful to my mom for 52 years. He is a risk-taker and a dreamer, and I get that from him. Recently, he asked me what things he could have done better as a father—what he needed to apologize for. I'm 43 years old and have never wanted to disappoint my dad or hurt his feelings, so I had never expressed any of these things until now. We talked for a couple of hours. He was gracious and humble and didn't make excuses. He just took responsibility and apologized. That broke a huge barrier between us. I have so much respect for him and love him with all my heart! When my dad stands before God and has to give an account for showing his children how much he loved Jesus, God will say, "Well done."

Please visit **CCMmagazine.com** to watch the official lyric video for "Calling All Fathers," including a behind-the-story video from Smith. [ccm](http://ccm)

# REVIEWS

jun 15, 2016



**RED**

***End Of Silence: 10th Anniversary Edition***

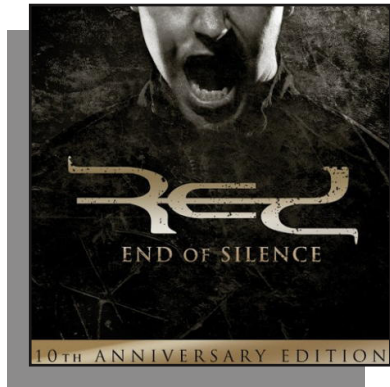
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Head Welch*

**WE LIKE:** "Breathe Into Me"

★★★★☆



In the ten years since **RED** released its hard rocking debut ***End Of Silence***, the group racked up six Dove Awards, scored two GRAMMY nominations and sold more than a million albums. Though the band is still going strong, the anniversary year has prompted a reexamination of this highly influential crossover collection that sounds just as relevant as ever thanks to anthemic choruses, crunching guitars and pummeling percussion over lyrics of boldly living out one's faith.

In addition to a remastered version of the original album, this collection includes four acoustic tracks and two previously unreleased songs from the sessions that will be of considerable interest to die-hards, while also giving younger listeners a more complete chance to discover what they may have missed the first time around.

—Andy Argyrakis

**Cana's Voice**

***This Changes Everything***

(StowTown Records)

**FOR FANS OF:**

*Avalon, Signature Sound, Selah*

**WE LIKE:** "Love Anyway"

★★★★☆



Cana's Voice may be a brand new group, but members **Jody McBrayer** (formerly of **Avalon**), **Doug Anderson** (previously of **Signature Sound**) and **TaRanda Greene** (who's appeared with the **Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir** among others) are some of Christian music's most beloved singers. Put them all together with Dove Award winning producer **Wayne Haun**, and this super trio is absolute dynamite when it comes to harmonies, solos and all around inspiration.

Blending contemporary pop with hints of country and southern gospel stylings, ***This Changes Everything*** revolves around a theme of hope for the hopeless, particularly those who feel like they're ready to throw in the towel on their faith. But by the end of the 13-track collection (which includes songwriting contributions from Haun, **CeCe Winans**, **Tommy Sims** and others), listeners are sure to feel recharged from not only the moving messages, but also the sheer majesty of these three gifted voices blending together.

—Andy Argyrakis



**Myron Butler & Levi**

***On Purpose***

*(Capitol CMG)*

**FOR FANS OF:**

*Kirk Franklin, James Fortune*

**WE LIKE:** “On Purpose”

★★★★☆



Let there be no question about the biggest gospel release of the summer. **Myron Butler & Levi** celebrate ten years of working together with the power-packed ***On Purpose***, a star-studded affair that includes luminaries like **Tamela Mann** and **Bishop T.D. Jakes** alongside the acclaimed duo.

The entire worship set encourages the believer to move forward through new life in Christ, from giving God their “Best Praise” to realizing they can move on from painful places on the title track. This studio release would sound especially dynamic in a live setting with several spirited cuts, but maybe that’s an idea for MB&L’s next 10 years.

—Matt Conner

**The Union Of Sinners And Saints**  
***The Union Of Sinners And Saints***

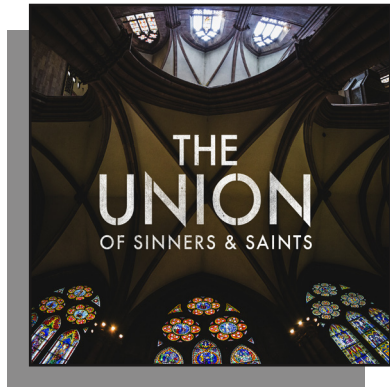
(Suite 28 Records)

**FOR FANS OF:**

*Petra, Whiteheart, Newsboys*

**WE LIKE:** “Christ the Lord is Risen Today”

★★★★★



As longtime members of **Petra** and **Whiteheart** respectively, singer **John Schlitt** and guitarist/producer **Billy Smiley** sure know how to rock loud and proud. But rather than resting on past laurels or cashing in on nostalgia, the veterans have formed the brand new band **The Union Of Sinners And Saints** with some of Christian music’s finest players and are translating their classic sensibilities to today.

Whether it’s a blazing cover of the classic hymn “Christ the Lord is Risen Today” (in the tradition of the **Petra Praise** series) or a stable of entirely new originals, the guys aren’t shy about their faith or witnessing to the world at large. And even with more than a dozen million album sales behind them, Schlitt, Smiley and the band sound as musically hungry as ever with a straight ahead melodic rock collection that ranks right up there with either co-leader’s best work.

–Andy Argyrakis

**Travis Ryan**

***Until My Voice Is Gone***

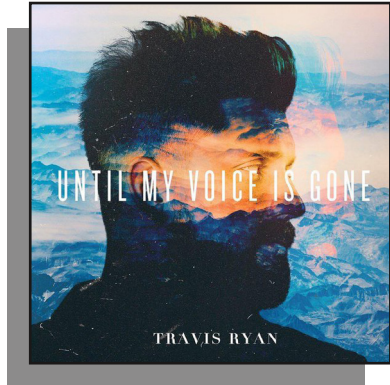
*(Integrity)*

**FOR FANS OF:**

*Casey Darnell, Sarah Macintosh*

**WE LIKE:** "Heartbeat"

★★★★☆



Let's get something straight so no one is confused.

**Travis Ryan's** newest album, ***Until My Voice Is Gone***, is the combination of two live worship EPs—***You Hold It All*** (released last fall) and ***Heartbeat*** (released this spring). If you own the former, then you're already likely a fan of Ryan's passionate, charismatic delivery.

*Until My Voice Is Gone* brings together the live set recorded over two nights at Smyrna, TN's LifePoint Church. The energetic "Your Love Set My Soul On Fire" is aflame with a Euro-rock backing, while "Heartbeat" shows Ryan's sensitivity to linger in the Spirit's presence. If you're new to Travis Ryan, then this whole worship set is a perfect place to start for a very talented worship leader and songwriter.

—Matt Conner



**Eshon Burgundy**

***The Passover***

(NFTRY)

**FOR FANS OF:**

*Th3 Saga, Abiv, Stef Silva*

**WE LIKE:** “Dead Letter”

★★★★☆



**Eshon Burgundy's** latest album isn't necessarily a concept album per se, but it's heavily rooted in the Biblical story of ***The Passover***, with songs anchored in the before-and-after of God's work in the life of the album's protagonist. The veteran hip-hop artist exposes his own need for the gospel atop a largely old-school hip-hop feel that lacks aggression or even vivid tones that keep the focus on lyrics.

Burgundy's story is perhaps best told on “Dead Letter” where he says, “Dead to my sin, alive in the flesh/ life in my pen, a drum in my chest/ heart of conviction, grateful and blessed/ fully forgiven, tasting regret.” *Passover* is chill with lots of chew on.

—Matt Conner

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***Dig In The Dirt***

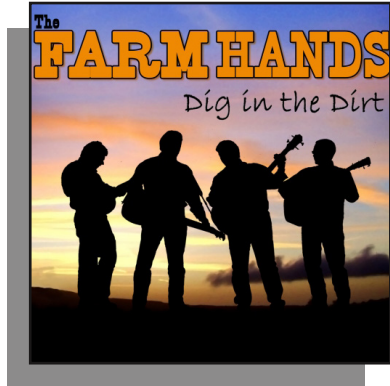
(Pinecastle Records)

**FOR FANS OF:**

*Ron Block, Ricky Skaggs*

**WE LIKE:** "All The Way Home"

★★★★☆



Fans of bluegrass/gospel will already know **The Farm Hands** catalog inside and out. The band continues to rack up numerous awards each year in their genre since their inception in 2010, anchored in their Opry-level experience and tender melodies.

The Farm Hands' newest album, ***Dig In The Dirt***, features twelve total songs, five of which were penned by band members. Highlights on this set include their downhome take on "I Saw The Light," the beautiful and delicate "All The Way Home," the lovely harmonies on "I Would" and the strong memories sung about on "Homefolks."

—Matt Conner

**Jayden Frost**  
***Everything EP***

(Self-released)

**FOR FANS OF:**

*Empire Of The Sun, Britt Nicole, M83*

**WE LIKE:** “The Promise”

★★★★☆



In our current musical climate of 80s-influenced synth pop, it's only natural to see a guy like Jayden Frost returning to the scene. Former member of the band that produced arguably one of the biggest hits of that decade, **When In Rome's** “The Promise”—which enjoyed rebirth after appearing on the *Napoleon Dynamite* soundtrack in 2004—specifically, Frost's comeback has been anything but natural.

From 80s hit wonder, solo artist pursuits, temporarily losing his voice, stints as a professional wrestler, to now owning and running his own vintage toy store in Dallas, TX—the multi-faceted singer, in collaboration with producers **Ian Eskelin** and **Barry Weeks**, releases his aptly titled faith-based EP, *Everything*. Note, dancing shoes required.

—Kevin Sparkman



**PJ Anderson**

***Mercy Mercy***

*(Self-released)*

**FOR FANS OF:**

*Matt Hammitt, Philip LaRue,  
Cold War Kids*

**WE LIKE:** “Love Will Heal”

★★★★☆



A few degrees left (or right) of center sonically from the current worship-genre trajectory, **PJ Anderson** offers ***Mercy Mercy***, a loaded 15-song album complete with thought-provoking tracks all resting on a soothing, rich musical palette featuring deep arrangements and intricate harmonies. “

We Adore You” specifically captures Anderson’s exceptional vocal performance, showcasing range and passion. “Sons And Daughters” and “Your Great Love” are the upbeat standouts on a mostly slow-to-mid tempo collection, however, the flow and overall timbre of *Mercy Mercy* is such a refreshing listen, the album will thoroughly be enjoyed in any setting or mood.

–Kevin Sparkman



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