

IN REVIEW: LOVE & THE OUTCOME, TAMELA MANN | IN THE STUDIO WITH HIGHROAD

CCM



CASTING CROWNS LIVING IN THE HERE & NOW

HOW ARE THEY TURNING
THEIR SOMEDAYS
INTO TODAYS?



THE AFTERS
LIFTING A BATTLE CRY?



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From the Editor

Out & About

Exclusive pics of your favorite artists!

In this issue: Skillet, Jason Crabb, Stryper, Audrey Assad + more!



Casting Crowns

How are they now turning their somedays into todays? As they continue their pursuit of Christ, we are invited to come along for the ride.



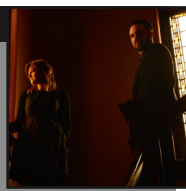
The Afters

Finding light and life through the darkness, The Afters weather the storms and discover it's The One whom fights our battles



All Sons & Daughters

Weaving their way throughout a European trek, the Nashville duo links past with present on their fourth studio album



In The Studio: Highroad

Find out what Ben Isaacs and Jason Crabb have been up to in addition to their "nine-to-five's"



Reviews

New music from The Afters, Love & The Outcome, PC&D, Tamela Mann + much more!



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Pieces of heaven | Next month, on October 11, 2016 to be exact, the **Gospel Music Association** will celebrate its **47th Dove Awards** to recognize the best in this wonderful, little family we call gospel music. Check out the official trailer by [CLICKING HERE](#).

I find myself struck by this year's theme, **Love. Amplified.** Three words from the narrative in the video particularly stick out to me.

Together. *...alone they are just the pieces—one song, one verse, one rap, one rhyme—but together, oh man, together it's a whole other story.* In **Matthew 18:20** Jesus says, *For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them* (NKJV). When we're together, He's there, and He's taking our pieces and doing something big.

Multiplied. *He multiplies a few voices to reach many...* And when we're truly together, it's not just a matter of addition—the reach is exponential. Think of the variety of “flavors” in our musical genre's alone and the millions upon millions of people on earth who identify with each one of them. Gospel music is actually a big, beautiful thing, and with Jesus the sum of its pieces is staggering.

Love. Amplification requires many parts working together, but it doesn't happen without a connection to its main source of power. *He who does not love does not know God, for God is love (1 John 4:8, NKJV).* If we have the potential to influence and reach millions upon millions, if it's not the sound of love we're putting out there, then it is just noise. *We carry pieces of heaven to this broken earth to rescue, restore, and echo His Word.*

We can't wait join together and reflect on another year of sharing the love of Jesus through music—stay tuned to CCMmagazine.com and our socials channels for everything Dove Awards.



Blessings,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin Sparkman'.

Kevin Sparkman

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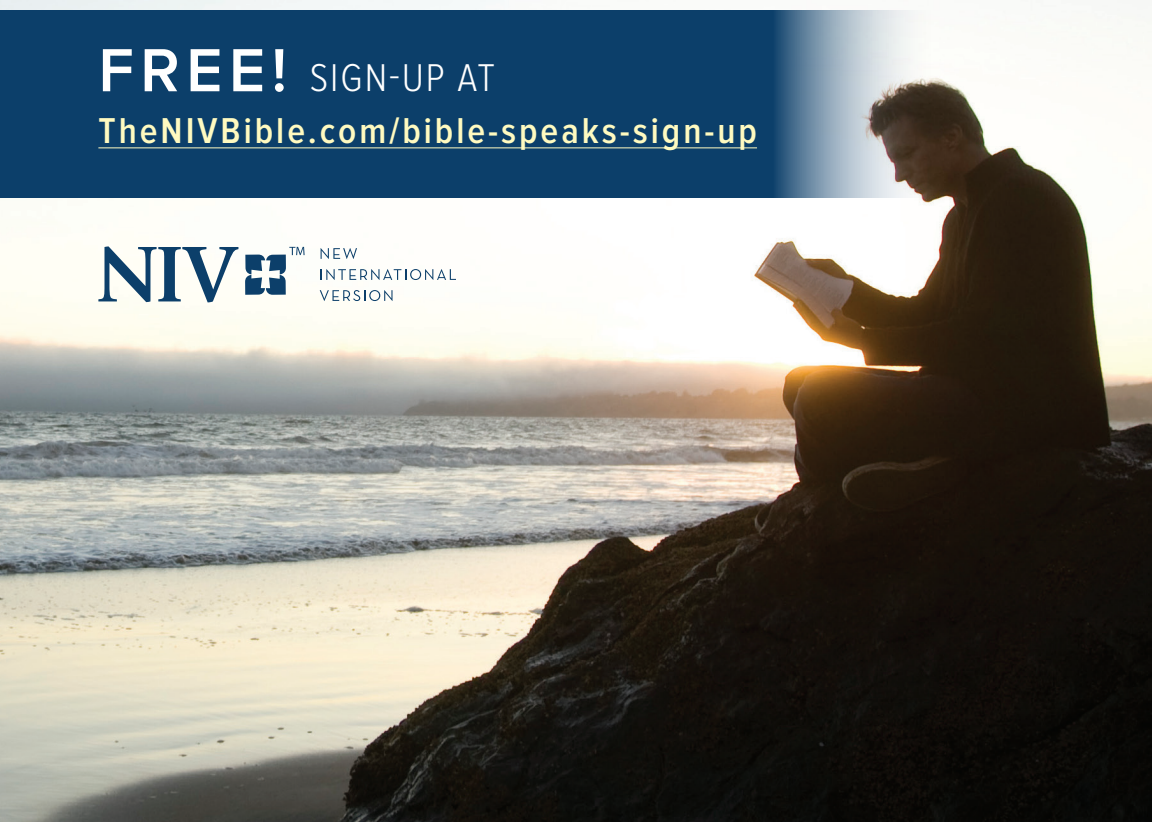
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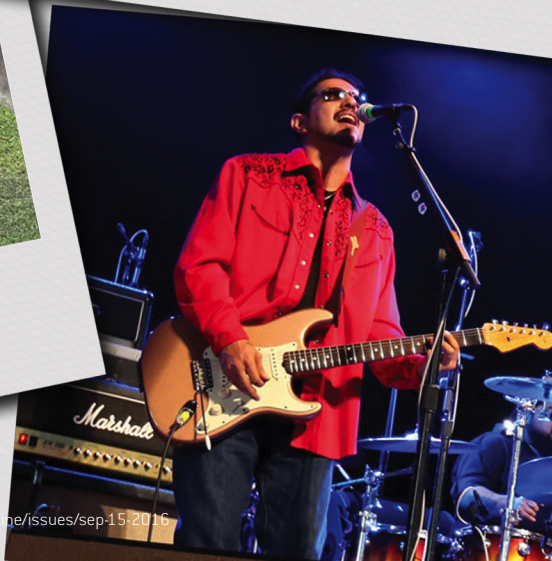


OUT & ABOUT

sept 15, 2016



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CASTING CROWNS



Casting Crowns — The Next Best Thing

Casting Crowns continues their pursuit of Jesus, taking the rest of us along for the journey

By Caroline Lusk

Here in the United States, we have become a nation of planners. Whether it's planning for college, a wedding, vacation or our retirement plans—if there's a checklist to be made and bullet points to be hashed-out, we're all over it.

The same can even apply to our faith. Our walk with Christ can easily become a series of things we're going to do "someday." With the best of intentions, we ease into a pattern of projection and preparation and lose sight of the possibility of today.

For **Mark Hall** and the members of **Casting Crowns**, it's a trend they have watched take root across generations. So much so, it is the area of focus for their students in their Atlanta-based home church and, aptly, the crux of the message in their latest album, titled ***The Very Next Thing***.

"We've got this idea of an awesome walk with Jesus out there somewhere, and we're looking for the bridge to get over to it," says Hall. "Serving God isn't this giant dream a year from now. It's not this thing He's going to have you do in a month. It's right now. Following God is the next word of love that I need to speak to somebody, the very next heart that needs to be encouraged. Ministry isn't on Sunday; it's not on a stage. It's you, where you are, doing the next thing God tells you to do."

Such a message carries extra weight when delivered by Hall and his colleagues. Despite being the *Billboard*'s number one top-selling Christian act since 2007, the band members have maintained their roles as full-time youth pastors in their respective home churches. The duality of their lives has not only delivered ample source material over the years, but has engendered a level of humanity and normality within their hearts and lives that lends to their music in both artistry and utility.

"Because we have the honor of waking with people in our churches, we get to see what they are going through—the issues that are impacting everyone now," says Hall. "It's in these situations that ideas are born for what we need to hear right here and right now."

Beyond pure observation and experience, Casting Crowns puts each of their songs through the "so-what" test, a tried and true method that's more intuitive than scientific, but none-the-less delivers palpable results that have contributed to the continued relevancy of the band and their songs.

"**Steven Curtis Chapman** shared something with me that **Bill Gaither** had shared with him years ago," shares Hall. "He said that every song needs to conclude with the 'so-what' test. If people are giving us four minutes of their lives, can we tell them or ask them why? There are many times I'll hear a song I like, but have no idea what it's about. I don't want to just assume that I'll get three or four times to make an impression on a listener. There has to be an urgency in the way we do things."

From beginning to end, each track on *The Very Next Thing* passes said test with flying colors. One such stand out track was derived from a particularly vulnerable moment in Mark Hall's life that elegantly posits his personal pain in a manner that's not only accessible, but beautifully transparent and achingly raw.

“‘Oh My Soul’ took shape soon after my doctor told me I had cancer,” shares Hall. “There’s a scripture in **Psalms** that reads, *Why so downcast oh my soul? Put your hope in God.* David is such a real guy, just talking to himself, saying, ‘You know the truth. Why are you letting this get to you? You know there’s hope. Stop living off what you feel and go with what you know.’ That song, for me, was sort of bleeding that out.”

Hall’s cancer is currently under control and, though down to one kidney, he is doing well. Nonetheless, the front man is well aware of his ever-present need to be in the company of his Savior and his healer.

“The more time I spend with God daily, the easier it is to know Him and to be in a position to bring things before Him,” he says. “If I haven’t really been praying and then a storm comes, it’s a little messy. Trying to get right with Him while asking for His help at the same time makes me doubt what I hear or if I even deserve to ask for His help in the first place. To me, the more time I’m spending with Him everyday the more I understand why He has me at this point in time in these circumstances.”

Ever a collaborative endeavor, *The Very Next Thing* masterfully combines the life experiences of each band member with the creative intuition of another, finished off with the spiritual insight and revelation of another.

This interplay breathes itself to light on the frolicking, roots-y toe-tapper, “Song That The Angels Can’t Sing,” featuring lead vocals from its main writer, **Megan Garrett**.

“I started writing this about nine years ago after I sang in a small Baptist church in the middle of Georgia. A lady came up to me and said, ‘You sing like an angel.’ It got me to thinking

that angels are creative beings whose sole purpose is to worship. There's a big difference between us and them. We can sing about salvation and redemption, which the angels can never know fully because they've not experienced it."

The record concludes with "Loving My Jesus," an uncomplicated take on the deep profundity of the love between man and His savior.

"The cool thing about this song is that on the surface, it looks like we're talking about the future. We all know how hard it can be to carry the future on our shoulders, but if we can look at it as one thing at a time...how do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. Time is just moments strung together anyway," says **Brian Scoggin**. "Just talk to this person and love this person. It'll change you by bits. If you keep following that, you'll discover that you've been doing His will all along.

"When we started playing this song live, it was easy to look at ourselves and think that we're really not all that cool. We don't have dancers or lasers like a bunch of other bands. So what are we doing here? The truth is that God has us here for a reason. We'll come and do what we do and let God do what He wants. Show our scars, love our Jesus and tell our story."

It's a formula they've followed for years and the impact upon the world is immeasurable. But when it comes down to priorities and realities, perhaps the band's success is because they don't measure in terms of records sold or radio charts being topped.

"We live in real people's lives every week," says Hall. "That can be a quippy, cool spiritual statement without a clear meaning. To us, that means that we are living life alongside those who



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we serve. We've got a very cynical generation coming up and you can easily appear to be one more paid person in their lives telling them what to do. You have to lead by relationship—not position. You have to earn the right to speak into them. All of our songs reflect something we're teaching or going through or have gone through with a real person, a real family."

While history lends ample weight to the notion that Casting Crowns has this ministry and music thing all figured out, humility and humanity beg a different case.

"Our students and different things that come up day to day will stump us all the time," says Hall. "Much like planning for your future career or ministry, you want to have all the answers, but you've got to be okay with not knowing."

And while the future likely bodes well for continued success in music and in their community, Casting Crowns knows as well as anyone else that despite the best-laid plans and intentions, tomorrow is unknown. Today is given and the farthest many of us can see is that which lies right before us—the very next thing, which is often as simple, profound and beautiful as what they have done from day one—walking with Jesus and taking someone else along. CCM

"Our family has a wilderness lodge in Alaska where I've worked as a guide for about twenty years. Basically, I keep people safe all summer while I show them big furry bears and whales bigger than our boat. Two years ago I was on the job when my doctor called. . . .

Being told you have stage-four cancer changes your life. It was no joke what we were faced with.

The survival rate is less than twenty percent. I prayed, 'God, how do I do this? You will lead me. You will direct me. You will guide me.'

My wife and kids rallied around me. We spent time in daily prayer and worship, and they prayed scripture over me. It was five months of chemo, six weeks of radiation on a daily basis and then a ten-hour surgery involving two specialists.

In total, the bills came to more than \$160,000, and our fellow Medi-Share members shared nearly every cent! I felt incredibly supported through it all. . . .

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—Jordan and Jennie



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THE AFTERS

The Afters — After The Storm

Finding light and life through the darkness

By Caroline Lusk

There's rarely a shortage of challenges to overcome or tragedies to move beyond. At some point in life, there will inevitably be more clouds than sun. For **The Afters**, life has been full of loss, heartache and tragedy. So it might seem a little strange that their latest album title is a far cry from loss. ***Live On Forever*** speaks of life everlasting, joy never-ending and rainbows pushing the clouds aside.

"I've always been a glass half-full person," says **Josh Havens**, lead vocals of The Afters. "Our pastor had a sermon recently that talked about seeing God in the rainbows. Good things come after the storm."

And they would know a thing or two about storms.

"My own family has been in and out of the ER six times this summer alone," Havens shares. The many trips, bought on by troublesome appendixes, broken bones and meningitis, followed two previous years of many dear friends passing away. Ironically enough, the loss set their mind on the glory that is to come in the hereafter.

"With all the people we had lost, our minds had been focused on heaven," says Havens. "Our hope was to encourage people, provide hope and remind them that we grow through tragedy and God is faithful through it all."

“A lot of our songwriting process was getting together and just talking through what was going on,” Havens continues. “We wrote all these songs together. The lyrics were the result of us processing and dealing with life. We’ve been doing this for seventeen years. This is our fifth record. We don’t want to make music *just because*. Music has to mean something, otherwise there’s no point. We pored over these songs for two years. Life’s too short not to do that.”

Out of those conversations came themes, ideas and beautiful takes on what would otherwise be devastating losses.

Take, for example, the song “Battles.” One of Havens’ best friends learned that his wife had stage four colon cancer.

“I saw a picture they posted of their family,” Havens recalls. “He and his wife and their two kids were going in for the chemo treatments dressed up like superheroes. They wrote that they weren’t afraid because God was with them. Seeing them was just like seeing **David** going before **Goliath**. In the midst of painful times, I’m reminded that He fights our battles and is faithful.”

Likewise, the song “Shadows” emerged from the band’s reflection on who God has crafted them to be over the years during the hard times.

“I love the opening track, ‘Shadows,’” Havens shares. “It’s a song about not being defined by your past and knowing you are the person God made you to be and to shake it off. Sonically, we pushed ourselves to do something a little different, which kind of defines who the band is in this new chapter.”

Indeed, the entire album is an exercise in sound development and sonic risk taking. Just as much care went into the art of melody as it did the composition of lyric and story.

“We pushed ourselves to craft something that didn’t sound like everything else,” Havens says. “Our drummer produced the record and pushed us to bring our best.”

While their effort and attention to detail was relentless in the studio, their overall approach to work, music and balance has shifted dramatically over the years, inspired by one of their earliest encounters in the industry.

When they began their musical journey, they burned up the road, clocking in a whopping 280 dates annually. Unsurprisingly, that schedule took a toll on their family lives and their overall enthusiasm for what they were doing.

“We were feeling completely burned out,” Havens recalls. “We had a show once with **Casting Crowns** and I spoke with **Mark Hall**. I asked him how he did this. I shared that I felt like I wasn’t home enough and I wasn’t a part of my kids’ spiritual life.

“Hall’s answer was short and sweet—basically, you don’t have to do it this way. You can change it.”

Taking a hint from Hall, who has remained the full-time youth pastor at his home church throughout Casting Crowns’ musical foray, the guys backed off the road, turned their attention towards home and began reaping benefits beyond what they could have ever imagined.

“When we made our priorities right and started focusing on being better parents, that’s when God blessed The Afters the

most,” says Havens. “We are very intentional with how we tour and how we spend our time. God told us to be musicians, but that’s not number one. We care called first to love Him, to be great husbands and fathers and to make sure we are honoring the things God calls us to honor.”

Their refined priorities have led them to experience an unusual closeness through the years. Whereas many bands go their separate ways when not on-stage, The Afters actually hang out together. Their families are friends and their relationships are deep.

Thus, when one band member experiences a loss, that pain is shared, but so too are the blessings.

“There were some very painful times in the past couple of years. Our sound guy is one of our dearest friends,” Haven shares.

“Year before last, in August of 2014, his wife went into labor, but their daughter passed away at birth. We went to the funeral. No casket should ever be that small. It was a time of real pain for all of us. But we had a tour coming up later that fall and invited him to bring his wife along in hopes that we could just love on them and be supportive of them.

“We were in Amsterdam, just walking around and found a restaurant named Pieper. That was the name of their baby. We had never seen it spelled that way before anywhere else. We ended up going to the restaurant and as we were getting up to leave, we noticed there was an award for hospitality. The award had Pieper’s name on it and when our friends noticed the date on the award, they burst into tears. It was Pieper’s birthday. On the other side of the world, the only thing on the wall just happens to have her date on it. It was a glimpse that God is with us through even the darkest nights. That moment was seeing God’s angels at work.”

A similar moment came in Josh's home church when a 19-year old girl, in the prime of her life, was killed by an impaired driver. The loss sent the church reeling, wondering why God would remove such a shining star. But when it came to her funeral the following week, the event was a celebration of the love this young girl had for Jesus. Thirty people ended up giving their lives to Christ at her funeral.

As the band members reflected on these events, they took to scripture, noting how beautifully the book of **Job** captured such searing loss.

"Job lost everything and he shaved his head, fell to his knees and worshipped God," Havens says. "When we face struggles in life, we have a choice. Do we blame God and be angry or see what He is doing? The thing the Bible says more than anything else is do not be afraid. Even with the heavy things that we've been through in the past couple of years, we know that in Christ, fear has no place. We pray that our journey and the album that has come about from it will be an encouragement and a weapon to fight fear with light and faith in the hope of our Savior. Throughout it all, my biggest encouragement is from people who have been there for me. I hope we can do the same." [CCM](#)



ALL SONS & DAUGHTERS

All Sons & Daughters

A History of Poets and Saints

Weaving their way throughout a European trek, the Nashville duo links past with present on their fourth studio album

By Jen Rose Yokel

Emily: *“Does anyone ever realize life while they live it... Every, every minute?”*

Stage Manager: *“No. Saints and poets maybe... they do some.”*

—Thornton Wilder, *Our Town*

The simplest phrase can unlock a world of ideas, feelings, experiences, and history. For **Leslie Jordan**, half of the duo **All Sons & Daughters**, two lines from a classic play sparked an idea that would grow into something even bigger than the new album she and **David Leonard** intended to make. “I was reading **Madeleine L’Engle’s** book *Walking On Water*, and in one section she’s quoting the stage play *Our Town*,” Jordan recalls. “And she goes on to talk about these two groups of people—poets and saints. Why are they able to experience life more than [others]? What makes them different?”

This simple phrase gave a title and focus to their fourth album, **Poets And Saints**. Seeking inspiration in the depths of church history and the work of beloved writers, their goal was to craft new worship songs rooted in the oldest of stories, highlight the

humanness of the giants of our faith, and draw connections between ancient and present day believers.

A whirlwind tour of Europe wasn't originally part of the plan. Neither was collaborating with their pastor **Jamie George** on a book and study curriculum, singing "Great Are You Lord" on the shores of Omaha Beach, and spending weeks in the studio creating songs from nothing but research, memories, ancient words, and legendary tales.

"It started very simplistic in its thinking, but the more we started talking about the ideas...it turned into this massive project," Jordan says, remembering the crazy experience with a laugh. "Thank goodness it was only revealed in small pieces!"

The Journey of a Lifetime

It's one thing to read about historic figures from an academic distance, but there's nothing like walking in the places they called home. With **St. Patrick** and **C. S. Lewis** among the people they wanted to study, Europe seemed like the most natural place to start digging around. Before long, the idea was spreading among the artistic community of Jordan and Leonard's home church, **The Journey Church** in Franklin, Tennessee.

"Leslie just started going to everybody with the idea...and then it just started snowballing," says Leonard. Soon the idea of exploring poets and saints became bigger than a new All Sons & Daughters album. Jamie George was already contemplating a teaching series on church history, as well as planning a trip to Europe to celebrate his daughter Ashton's sixteenth birthday. "We should just go together!" suggested George as the project grew. And with that, the trip began to take shape. David and Leslie, their spouses, Jamie and his family, a film crew and others made plans to take the continent spanning adventure together.

“There were certain people we really wanted to go after...we knew we wanted to go to Assisi for sure, and there was C.S. Lewis stuff,” says Leonard. “It was just trying to figure out how to get from one point to the other. We [were] ending in Rome, so we just kind of went, alright, what’s the path from London down to Rome?” With a rough map of cities to visit, they started to research the places and people who’d lived there—well known saints and semi-obscure writers alike.

On the first day of the trip, Leslie recalls “rolling up to this small town of Olney on this double decker tour bus, kind of like, ‘Um, I hope we don’t get in trouble and I hope we find what we’re looking for.’ Because we literally did not know what we were looking for.” The journey through Olney led them to the story of **William Cowper** and **John Newton**, an unlikely friendship that led to one of the world’s most famous hymns, “Amazing Grace.”

As they made their way from London to Paris, Geneva, and eventually Rome, the stories came to life in fresh, new ways. “Being able to see things that are older than we can ever imagine seeing over here,” says Leonard, “to see it and put our hands on it just brought everything to life. I think that was the same life that we fought for when we started writing these songs...it gave us a richer language.”

Coming Home

When the adventures were over and the crew returned to the States, George got to work on his biography and travel memoir, while Jordan and Leonard faced a very different task...taking so many moments and memories and the history they studied, and condensing them into beautiful, meaningful songs. And a project as ambitious as *Poets And Saints* called for a unique approach. “We knew what we were writing about, but we were trying to figure out how to make it into an album,” explains Da-

vid, “We have a studio, so we would go in every day from nine to five and literally just start making music.”

“We wanted it to sound like ultimate creativity and ultimate freedom,” adds Leslie. And this creativity is evident all over the record. Though it still takes the gentle, folksy approach All Sons & Daughters is known for, *Poets And Saints* isn’t afraid to experiment a little bit. “Heaven Meets Earth,” inspired by C. S. Lewis, opens with an ambient, mysterious atmosphere. “My Roving Heart” marries a lesser-known John Newton lyric with a modern pub vibe, partly to pay homage to Newton’s use of familiar pub tunes, and mostly to commemorate the fun of their first day in Olney. And, as the songs took shape in the studio, some pieces of Europe literally made their way into the record, via sounds Leonard recorded while abroad.

“In William Cowper’s house there were these brushes,” says Jordan, “so [David] started recording the sound of these brushes against the table, and the lock on the door locking...” Even the waves of Normandy Beach and a lighter found on the ground make their way into the record.

Past Meets Present

Of course, it’s impossible to pick one greatest moment from such an adventure, but Jordan does recall a discovery that sums up the spirit of the project. Their tour of London introduced them to the work of fantasy author and hymn writer **George MacDonald**, someone who, though unsuccessful in his lifetime, has an influence reaching into the work of L’Engle and Lewis, and still affecting the landscape of faith and fantasy fiction today.

That’s why, while sitting under a tree in Hyde Park, Jordan had a sort of epiphany about the lineage they were chasing: “George MacDonald might be the reason we’re here! Because his work

influenced Madeleine L'Engle, who we read, and that's where the whole idea started." And that's the spirit of *Poets And Saints*: tracing these unlikely, ordinary people through history, across London, Geneva, Paris, and Rome, all the way to a couple of songwriters in Nashville.

For Jordan, this sort of human connection of past and present is just one more testament of God's mysterious and beautiful power. "God is transcendent...He takes something that is ancient and plants it in the present to wake us up." CCM





In The Studio: HighRoad

Album Title: *Somewhere I'm Going*

Release date: Scheduled for September 30, 2016

Producers: Ben Isaacs

The acclaimed bluegrass/country group releases their third recording, ***Somewhere I'm Going***, September 30, 2016. Founding member **Sarah Davison** shares about their recent studio experiences with **The Isaacs' Ben Isaac** (producer) and a special guest-star surprise collaboration.

CCM Magazine: *You worked with GRAMMY-nominated producer Ben Isaacs on HighRoad's 2014 recording, **Angel At The Crossroads**, and your new record, **Somewhere I'm Going**. What has it been like collaborating with him?*

Sarah Davidson: Completing a project with Ben is honestly one of the biggest blessings we could imagine. He knows how our group sounds live and he has heard us frequently over the past few years. Ben has been extremely supportive and encouraging, knowing just how to musically broaden the sound of the group, whether it's tweaking a mandolin lick, or setting up the microphone differently for the vocals. We trust him and have the utmost respect for his talent as a producer. So when we began writing for this project, of course he was the one we wanted to work with again!

CCM: *Was there anything different about recording with Ben this time around?*

SD: Working on this project with Ben really was more than just working on some songs. This album is mostly original music so it's like we are putting more of our hearts out there for the world to hear. Ben knows what that feels like and he really understood the purpose of the songs we chose.

CCM: Each of the women in HighRoad are accomplished instrumentalists. How is that reflected on the record?

SD: We all honestly love to play our instruments just as much as singing! I personally love arranging hymns and really enjoyed arranging several of the tunes on this project with Ben. We were sitting around one day and one of the girls said we should learn this old tune—and she started picking it out. So our listeners are going to find it on the new album—it's called "Squirrel Hunter." The song really showcases how much we love to play, and even includes a little bluegrass piano!

CCM: "Give Me Jesus" is a song that HighRoad often performs live. Why did you decide to include it on the new project?

SD: "Give Me Jesus" is a song that we have done live for a long time. It has a special meaning to me for a lot of reasons, but mainly because I've been realizing more in the past year that all we really need is Jesus. Just when we think we have things figured out, we don't—but God does and He's really all we need. When recording this song, we did it pretty much exactly how it sounds live—open and dynamic, and we hope it encourages a lot of folks the same way it encourages us every time we sing it.

CCM: Jason Crabb makes a guest appearance on the record. What was it like having him in the studio?

SD: "Christ, My Hope, My Glory" was a song I wrote with one of my favorite people in the world, **Kenna Turner West**. When we decided to record the song, we really wanted to make it special. We have had the honor of singing it with two choirs behind us, which was amazing in a live setting. Lauren, who plays fiddle, worked on arranging strings for cello and violin. Then when we heard from Ben that Jason was willing to sing on it, we were

absolutely thrilled. Working with Jason was a blast—we had so much fun! He brings this element of just utter surrender to Christ when he sings, and you can tell his faith is as real as it gets; he is only there to glorify God and it is evident in everything he does and sings about. It was an honor to have him on this project.

CCM: What do you like about Ricky Skaggs' studio?

SD: We love **Skaggs Studios** [in Hendersonville, Tennessee] because of its history and sound. The acoustics are awesome, the rooms sound great, and we love Ricky's collection of bluegrass memorabilia!

CCM: Was there a moment in the studio that holds a special place for you?

SD: My favorite moment was on the very last night of recording when we put the gospel choir on "Christ, My Hope, My Glory." Tears were flowing down my face as I was thinking "thank you Lord for giving us this song, for all these songs; for the ability to work with Ben and Jason and **Mark Capps**; for the opportunities and blessings You've given us. We are so unworthy. Thank you." It was a moment I will never forget. CCM

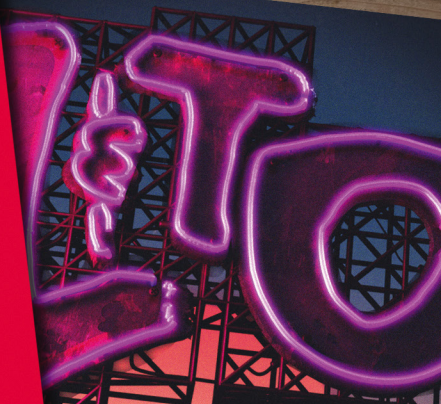
LIVE ON FOREVER



THE AFTERS

REVIEWS

sept 15, 2016



THESE ARE THE DAYS



ELLIPS, CRAIG & DEAN

Hymns & Psalms

The Afters

Live On Forever

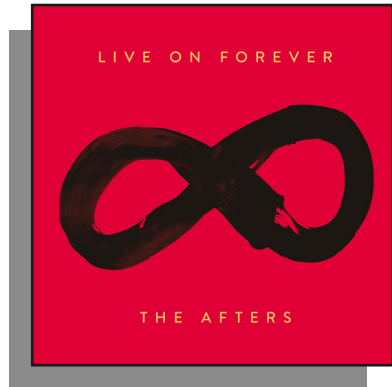
(FairTrade Services)

FOR FANS OF:

*Sanctus Real, Tenth Avenue North,
Imagine Dragons*

WE LIKE: "Shadows"

★★★★☆



On studio album number five, **The Afters** clearly sound like seasoned veterans, but there are also several subtle twists on a formula that's propelled the group to the top of the Christian charts on countless occasions.

This time through, the electronically-tipped anthems are abundant ("Shadows," "Battles," "Time Of My Life"), while the handful of building ballads ("Sunrise," "When You're With Me," amongst others) are just as gripping in a more contemplative context. Though birthed out of various trials for the band, **Live On Forever** finds solid footing in God's steadfastness and seems custom crafted for those seeking solace in the path of an uneasy storm

—Andy Argyrakis

Love & The Outcome

These Are The Days

(Word)

FOR FANS OF:

Walk The Moon, Katy Perry, Bleachers

WE LIKE: "These Are The Days"

★★★★☆



Taking every glorious element that made all the **John Hughes** soundtracks so awesome, crossed with today's towering electronic pop soundscapes, **Love & The Outcome's** second long player is energy and encouragement personified.

In fact, a sole listen to ***These Are The Days*** is likely to leave a lasting impression, not only because nearly all the tracks are unshakably contagious, but also due to the celebratory lyrical nature. Singer/songwriter **Jodi King** and bassist **Chris Rademaker** (who are also married to one another) sound absolutely jubilant addressing everyday matters of faith, while even those who might not share their beliefs simply won't be able to avoid dancing their way though "Stranger" or "Ends Of The Earth."

–Andy Argyrakis

Tamela Mann

One Way

(Tillymann Music)

FOR FANS OF:

Mary Mary, Crystal Lewis, Mary J. Blige

WE LIKE: "One Way"

★★★★☆



Singer/actress **Tamela Mann** is one of the most versatile voices and all around entertainers of the last two decades, so it's no surprise ***One Way*** bursts with vocal variety a wide swath of musical arrangements.

Whether it's the guitar and horn-stacked title track, the tender ballad "God Provides" (written and produced by **Kirk Franklin**) or the simmering groove of "Through It All" (produced by mainstream heavyweight **Timbaland**), this longtime Franklin/Tyler Perry collaborator comes across as inspired and relevant.

Lyrically speaking, the new collection celebrates both God's glory and His love for all of creation, which is overtly apparent no matter if the tone is directed towards the dance floor or a more contemplative moment of prayer.

–Andy Argyrakis

Phillips, Craig & Dean

Hymns & Psalms

(Self-released)

FOR FANS OF:

Casting Crowns

WE LIKE: "On Christ The Solid Rock"

★★★★☆☆



It's surprising to find out that the legendary vocal trio **Phillips, Craig & Dean** has never released a hymns project. For a group celebrating 25 years and 25 No. 1 singles this year, a hymns project seems like a safe assumption, but it's not until the recent release of ***Hymns & Psalms*** they've added such an album to their catalog. Like any hymns release, the songs should be familiar to most, and PCD's signature strong vocal work is front and center on most tracks.

When the songs are straightforward ("I Surrender All," "On Christ the Solid Rock"), the veterans' vocal work does the heavy lifting and represents the album's finest moments. In other places, awkward arrangements ("Blessed Assurance," "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms") distract from the lasting power and vocal prowess found elsewhere.

—Matt Conner

Joe Frey
Hold Fast

(Self-released)

FOR FANS OF:

Housefires, David Grey, Band Of Horses

WE LIKE: "Faithful"

★★★★☆



It's fitting that emerging New England singer-songwriter **Joe Frey**'s most recent release is an EP—which, in this case, should stand for "encouraging people." On ***Hold Fast***, Frey overlaps the message of God's hope and restoration time and again, especially on the collection's strongest tracks "Restore My Soul" and "Faithful."

You can feel the passion in Frey's voice, as his often-tinny melodies effectively rise and strain like that of **David Grey**, but also echo the ethereal a la **Benjamin Birdwell** and very slight (but present) hint of **Bono** on certain phrasings and meter. Overall, *Hold Fast* is a promising project that should pave the way for more great music to come.

—Kevin Sparkman

Tyrus Morgan

When We Love

(Self-released)

FOR FANS OF: *Stars Go Dim, Jonny Diaz, Seventh Time Down*

WE LIKE: "When We Love"

★★★★☆



Tyrus Morgan kicks off his anticipated third LP with title track, "When We Love," boasting its bold and poignant statement of only finding God and the best of us when we earnestly seek and fulfill **Mark 12:31**, *Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.* Considering Morgan's extensive songwriting and production career, it's easy to quickly hear that ***When We Love*** is a cut above the mold on both points.

Morgan continues his signature crisp, less-is-more approach, but we were pleased to hear a more versatile and whimsical timbre on tracks like "Your Love Won't Be Denied" and "Give It All Back" (not sure if keytar's were used in the studio?). Don't miss the **Unspoken** cover "Good Fight," which Morgan originally co-penned for their 2014 release, and the hymn-like "My Soul Be Satisfied."

—Kevin Sparkman

Katy Kinard

God Of Fireflies

(Self-released)

FOR FANS OF:

*Nicole Nordeman, Natalie Merchant,
Aimee Mann*

WE LIKE: “When You Found Me”

★★★★☆



The intricacies found in lyricist-vocalist **Katy Kinard's** latest offering ***God Of Fireflies*** are about as bountiful as those winged little buggers themselves, found buzzing about a mid-summer's night. Speaking of fireflies, what an excellent metaphor to describe this album, light on—bouncy and bright, and light off—heavy and dark.

Our favorite moments are the lighter ones, showcased on tracks like “God Of Fireflies,” “Sunshine,” and “Human For Me,” where Kinard uses a lullaby-like tone to describe her thankfulness for Jesus’ life as a child (a very interesting perspective, a must-listen). “Be Like You” is more smart word-smithing and was inspired by a conversation between **Mother Teresa** and a mother from the United States.

—Kevin Sparkman



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