

KJ-52 | THE BRILLIANCE | IN REVIEW: CECE WINANS, REBA, KARI JOBE

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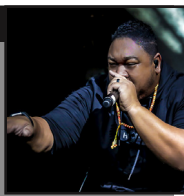
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CCM Magazine is owned and published by Salem Media Group

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Why I'm boycotting SNL, and you should, too | I really hate to come like this, barreling in like a "Debbie Downer" (pun intended), but I'm officially flipping the switch on ***Saturday Night Live***. You should, too.

For me, favorite sketches such as "More Cowbell," "Celebrity Jeopardy," and "Choppin' Broccoli" will always be fun and fond memories, but, it's not like I'm ripping off a Band-Aid, here. Honestly, it's been several years since I can really claim to be a devoted fan. This, mostly evidenced by the fact that I would be fast asleep before the opening monologue was over.

While, in the past, the show set the bar for television sketch comedy and even seemed to naturally permeate hallway chatter on a weekly basis, but let's be real, these days the entire production—cast, guest hosts, musical talent, the writing—they're all sub-par at best. Being able to giggly interact with a couple of friends on Sunday or Monday morning about, "Hey, did you see that one sketch on Saturday Night Live last night?!" may have marked a coming-of-age moment for some teens or early-twenty year-olds at one time, now that conversation takes an awkward tone as the chirping of crickets only seems to grow louder.

But this ban is more than just "growing up" and experiencing a change in tastes. True, SNL has always prided itself in exploiting the lighter side of current cultural, social, and political topics, but its recent blatant one-sided agenda-driven brand of "comedy" has a much different tone than the heydays of **Eddie Murphy, Dan Aykroyd, Jim Belushi, Chevy Chase, Adam Sandler, Victoria Jackson, Jon Lovitz, and Will Ferrell** (some of my all-time favorites).

As if most of the current politically charged content wasn't enough to make us gag, last week, one of SNL's writers, **Katie Rich**, infused our social feeds with the same banter aimed at a 10 year-old **Barron Trump**, resulting in her indefinite suspension from the show. Not that I really needed one, but this was the last straw for me. And while I don't always agree with **President Donald Trump**, I do believe Saturday Night Live is "a failing show."

So let me encourage you—your social status or ability to confidently talk with your friends won't suffer, in fact, you'll be much better off. Trust me, there are PLENTY of other places to get "Fake News" (and your giggles) on television these days!



Blessings,

Kevin Sparkman
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OUT & ABOUT

February 1, 2017



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Explore the world of Aethasia™, and join the Resistance in their fight against the tyrannical emperor and his army of mechanical men!

Once a beautiful land, Aethasia is now covered by a sickly pervasive fog that corrupts everything it touches. But all is not lost. Rumors are spreading of a fledgling Resistance, who have the courage and audacity to try and restore Aethasia to its former glory, and to reinstate the The Great Engineer back to the throne of Aethasia.

And that Resistance needs you!



ELLIE HOLCOMB



Ellie Holcomb — Roads Unknown

Walking into the darkness with hands held high

By Caroline Lusk

None of us plan on left turns, valleys or barriers to waltz in and disrupt life. In a sense, we're all probably aware that those things can happen, but until they are staring us in the face—pushing back against whatever plans we had in the works—it's hard to understand or appreciate their gravity.

Ellie Holcomb is in a season seeped in gravitas. Her father was diagnosed with cancer last year, some of her dear friends experienced the loss of their babies and, most recently, her husband was battling meningitis.

These things were not in Holcomb's plans. They caught her off guard, and revealed to her how little control she has over life's events. Rather than be overwhelmed, however, Holcomb took these experiences—heartache and all—and turned them into music.

Music, it gave her a language through which to work out the nuances of these terribly difficult circumstances. Music, it gave her a soundtrack of hope instead of despair. Music, a tool for the rest of us to learn to hold on, be still, and let God be God—even in the depths.

The songs she wrote during this period have now come together on an album called **Red Sea Road**. Prompted by the story of the Israelites who fled Egypt only to face an army behind them and an ocean ahead. It was in their utmost moment of despair and

helplessness when God showed up, parted the waters, and created a way where there was no way.

We recently caught up with Ellie Holcomb recently to hear her story in her own words.

CCM Magazine: You've had quite a year! We know there have been lots of ups and downs, but how is life today—how are you?

Ellie Holcomb: I am really great. I would say grateful is probably the best way to describe things. We had a crazy December. My husband was in the hospital for five days with viral meningitis. He came home two days before Christmas. It was insane, but one of the sweetest Christmases we've had.

CCM: The new project is beautiful, but we know that it was an emotionally wrenching one to make. Did you plan on following your debut with an album of this nature?

EH: After the first record, people asked me what I was going to do next. I really didn't know. I just knew I was going to do life and be in His Word. I didn't know if I'd make another record or not. The last two years have been really heavy in our community. There has been a lot of sorrow, suffering, and loss. I wrote this record as a way of singing God's promises to my own heart; of seeing God meet our community in unbearable grief and sorrow.

CCM: The title is a gripping and interesting choice. Obviously, Red Sea Road must have something to do with Moses and the Israelites. How did you come to this idea for an entire album? Was it the overall story of the Exodus, or did something in particular grab you?

EH: It's an interesting story. In one sense, it's God delivering His people. They'd been set free with lots of suffering behind them, but now, there was an army and imminent death at their back. The sea was in front. If I'm with the Israelites, I know I'd be thinking that I would die if I just stayed there, but it could also kill me to walk through an ocean. But they are told something so powerful—to be still and let the Lord fight for them. They had no choice but to trust in an impossible situation.

CCM: *You've faced a lot of impossible situations this year, particularly with your dad, that must have had a profound impact on your writing.*

EH: Yes, I wrote a lot of these songs in the wake of a cancer diagnosis for my dad. I will never forget. It was a year ago, on my mom's birthday, when they got the diagnosis. Nobody is ever ready for that or prepared, but my mom and dad wanted to have a praise and worship night at their house. I'll never forget watching them run into all the unknown and darkness. It was the most unnatural response I've ever seen. In the same breath it was irresistible. Their posture was one of hope; not one that skirts its way around or ignores suffering, but one that faces it head-on and refuses to believe that it's the end of the story had arrived.

Philippians 4:4-7 says, "Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say again, rejoice."

That's a hard command, especially in the gut-wrenching things that life can throw at you. But there was a palpable presence of God that night. It's marked me forever.

CCM: *How could it not? Wow. So how does one come to a place where praise in the midst of despair is possible?*



EH: There is a line in one of the songs that says, “You’re asking us to lay our worry down and sing a song instead...” That’s a radical ask. It doesn’t add up. It’s a mystery to be suffering and told to go ahead and rejoice and sing.

But knowing the guarantee of the nearness of God gives me a song to sing. It makes me want to sing and proclaim and share that hope. It’s not a hope that God is good; it’s a hope that is grounded in an empty grave. It’s not rose-colored glasses. Look at the cross. Hope and light came from brutal suffering.

CCM: *Given your circumstances, did the imagery of the Red Sea Road come naturally to you? How did you settle on that particular theme as a paradigm for the album?*

EH: I wrote *Red Sea Road* with **Christa Wells** and there were days when the grief was so overwhelming and heavy, we would be weeping together. It was Christa that shared what **Ann Voss Kamp** said about the Red Sea. She wrote that, “There is an unseen hope that makes a Red Sea Road when there seems to be no way.”

I knew that I had a choice in my own grief and despair. I could choose to hold onto the brokenness, or choose to hold on to hope. It was a very emotional experience, writing that song. It helped me believe that even when my heart is breaking, He is faithful.

In our darkest times, our community came alongside and gave us a way to carry on. At the same time, it was like God was whispering, “I’ve been here too. My son came and died, and it’s okay.”

CCM: You mentioned earlier that your father's cancer diagnosis wasn't the only hardship you'd faced this past year, but also two of your friends lost children? How devastating.

EH: Yes, the past two years have been so broken with so much loss and suffering. Two dear families we know and love lost babies. One had a genetic disorder and only lived a few hours. The other was an adoption and the birth mother lost the baby. It was heart-wrenching, but we just had to remind ourselves that God lost his son too. Jesus was a man of sorrows. He was a man who was laden with grief and loss and suffering. He was broken for us. I don't know any other religion or faith in which God offers this kind of answer to suffering. It breaks my heart too, but one all of this sadness will be undone.

CCM: Your faith is so unwavering with regards to hope. Did you ever have days when you just didn't want to get out of bed? What about other people who had experienced losses? Were you able to draw comfort from the experiences of others?

EH: There were many days I didn't want to do anything! Absolutely. But last year I was so blessed to tour with **Steven Curtis Chapman**. We had several conversations about how he got through everything; how on earth he was able to tour and sing after losing **Maria**. He said, "I was on tour with **Michael W. Smith** and we would sing these old hymns during the middle of the show. These hymns would pull my soul out of the black pit of despair it was in. "It Is Well," "How Great Thou Art," "Blessed Be Your Name..."

Music is so powerful and it gives us a choice. I can choose to sing a song instead. I can choose to sing the faithfulness of God.

CCM: *And you do it so well. There are so many other great songs on the project. Are any others as poignant to you as the title track and first single?*

EH: There's a cool story behind "Rescue" and "I Will Never Be the Same." I wrote those with a group of eight other songwriters for YoungLife ministries; specifically for kids going to **YoungLife** camp.

No one planned on doing anything with them beyond the camp, but I loved the songs so much I went back to the group and asked if I could put them on the record. Almost all of us are singing on the album and we've donated all the publishing from those two songs to YoungLife.





CCM: Why YoungLife? Did you have any affiliation with them before?

EH: I actually used to work with there. I quit my teaching job to serve with YoungLife. There, I saw how music could be a bridge; connecting people to the ultimate bridge-builder. We volunteered with them for three years, singing and serving.

CCM: It's amazing to see how the fruits of your service are continuing to bless so many lives. I can only imagine that your family is also reaping the blessing of your creativity and work. How have they reacted to the project?

EH: I actually recorded a scratch vocal of the first single, "Find Me Here" with my producer Ben Shive the day my dad went in for surgery. I rushed over to the hospital and played it for mom and dad. I remember being in that cold hospital room, seeing their hands raised in praise. The music seemed to already be blessing them.

CCM: How is your dad now? Has your relationship with him changed at all throughout this process?

EH: He is in remission. We're thrilled but we know that's not the end of every cancer story. There are no guarantees in terms of health, but there is this guarantee. God was broken for us. We have this hope that whatever happens, no matter what, this side of glory or the next, there is healing and hope ahead.

With dad, I feel like in addition to him being my father and producer, I now feel like a fellow sojourner. That may sound kind of strange, but he's not just my father, but also my brother in Christ. All of us are God's children. That's been a pretty cool journey. **CCM**



KJ-52

KJ-52 — Still In The Game

He keeps topping his own game, so why should KJ-52 bow out now? This master of reinvention talks old guys on a young man's playing field.

By Matt Conner

Hip-hop is primarily a young man's game, according to **KJ-52**. Christian rap has even fewer pioneers than its mainstream counterparts, but that hasn't stopped the veteran Floridian from staying the course. KJ-52 has an incredible sixteen years under his belt, but even his latest—the very personal **Jonah**—landed at No. 7 on the iTunes hip-hop charts and features killer collaborations with **Derek Minor, Curt Anderson, Pete Stewart** and more. We recently asked the mainstay about the vulnerable new album and what it's like to be a considered a pioneer.

CCM Magazine: *We've heard you say that the new album was called Jonah because it's personal. Is that personal approach part of being older and having more experience, to have said a certain amount of things, before now?*

KJ-52: Literally everything you just said is a, "Yes." It's exactly right. It's a move of experience and it's a move of the nature of where I am at right now. I'm not trying to say this like an old, wise, Jedi-thing, but there is some of that where you feel like, "Dang, I have the music of a young man, but the experience of a grown man." Those two things are usually not working together, but I guess it's because I am the last man standing in some regards.

CCM: What do you mean by that?

KJ-52: A lot of the guys that I came in with are not around anymore. There are only a handful of my peers left from when I started. Hip-hop by nature is a young man's music, so you don't have people that have been around for a while. It's a relatively new musical genre, but for whatever reason, most of the guys that [came in with me] are not here anymore. So you go, "What happened? How did I wind up here?"

CCM: Are you surprised by your longevity?

KJ-52: I wasn't even aware of it. Most of my conversations these days start with, "Oh man, I used to listen to you when I was thirteen." And I'm like, "Yeah, you're an adult!" For me, 16 or 17 years went by like *that*. It doesn't feel like that much time has passed. Maybe that's because when your life changes from 25-42, while it is a life change, it is not the same significance of going from 15 to 30, you know? I went from adulthood to more adulthood, not adolescence to adulthood.



Am I surprised by my longevity? Absolutely. But it doesn't feel like it's been that long. I feel like a brand new artist in so many ways because I have always approached my music and my career as a brand new artist. I've approached every album as if it is a new chance to hit the reset button. I make every album as if you've never heard me. I also design my live performances as if you've never seen me.

CCM: When you say you, "Approach everything as if you've never heard me," what drives that?

KJ-52: No matter how you boil it down, Christian rap is a genre that you discover. You know what I am saying? People are raised on soul records and jazz records but no one says, "I was raised on Christian rap records." People discover it, and most people still don't know it exists. They discover it post-conversion or it's a music that is there for you when you get saved. It's too young to be a genre that fathers are raising their kids on.

So I have to be cognizant that every time I step into a room, or when I tell people what I do or when I am performing or making a record, I'm erring on the side of caution, which is that they've never heard me and don't know anything about this genre. That's my reference 99 times out-of 100.

The other problem is that this is not a genre that honors its pioneers. They don't even know about them, you know? It's not like mainstream hip-hop where you have a degree of reverence for old-school artists. Most Christian rap fans don't even know [the genre's pioneers]. For the most part, it is looked at as old-school and not-cool. It's just not honored. It's getting better [as time goes on], but the rules are just different, and that shapes what I do.

CCM: Obviously, we want to know about the new album. Did you have a strong vision of where you wanted to go with the songs on *Jonah*?

KJ-52: I had a loose idea. I didn't want to do the same thing I'd always done. I think part of it was that I had to be aware of my space within the genre, but I also factored in, and I hate to say this, but you have to be careful at this age. You don't want to walk in like an old guy in the club with dad-jeans on and a tropical fish shirt. I didn't want to be that type of guy that is like, "This is the way we always did it, so it should work this way." Even from an execution standpoint on certain songs, it is important not to be over-the-top goofy, which is not even my mindset, but I have to be very careful on things like that.

To give you an example, there is a stupid song I wrote called "Swagzilla." I was never going to put that song out, but in the process of the **PledgeMusic** campaign, I was using older songs to get people to sign up or generate interest. I put the song out and people freaked out about it. They were saying, "I love that song, where can I get it?" But I'm like, "Nobody says 'swag' anymore!" But this is indicative of the approach of five to seven years ago.

Eventually, half of the audience was divided on if I should actually release it. That's the great thing about PledgeMusic, in knowing that it wasn't going to go on the album but I can still make it a free download if you sign up. Normally in the past, with a major label situation, I couldn't do any of that. This is what I mean by being "aware of my space." My approach was listening to the fans.

CCM: You've got a great collaboration with Derek Minor, and we know there are a few others on the new album. Did you have a vision of who you want to call in? Or was it a matter of what friends are available?

KJ-52: Well, the thing with Derek was unique. We did a tour a few years ago. I'd already known him, but this tour formed a friendship and a bond. Also, it's not that I'm unaware of the younger sound, but he's able to really nuts-and-bolts that sound together for me. He was a sounding board. If I go, "Hey, what do you think about this?" and I'd trust his opinion. He's a hard person to impress, so if I could get his approval, I knew almost everyone would be on board with the track.

Even though Derek is only on one song and produced just two, his fingerprints are all over the record, whether you hear it or not. If anybody was the official A&R or the executive producer for Jonah, it was him. In fact, the whole reason I wrote the song "Nah Bruh" is because it's what he kept telling me when I tried new songs out on him. [Laughs] It was my revenge song. I told him if he kept saying that, I was going to write a song, which I did with someone else!

For a guy like Pete Stewart, that was a unique situation. I had worked with him back in the day and we'd done a ton of stuff together before. He did basically half the album, so anything that was super produced and super outside the norm, Pete was great for that because I could try anything. He is so talented; he played everything from electric guitar to piano to banjo to drum programming. His sonics are phenomenal and he did a lot of the tracks on the first **Macklemore** record. He's been around forever. Since there was no set date or time to have it out, we had time for trial and error on everything.

CCM: *Do you like having complete creative control?*

KJ-52: I am Star-Trek'ing it right now, boldly going where no one has gone! Compared to [being on a label], my workload is twice as heavy, but my passion is a billion times higher. It's a lot of fun. Here is an example: I am not shooting full music videos because



I know that people are probably only going to watch the first minute anyway—even if you like the song and video. Not that I wouldn't shoot a full video, and I probably will eventually, but it's easier now for me to shoot one minute videos, which are a teaser of something that will engage you.

My goal right now is for you to want to go get the song or the album. Another cool idea is the packaging. I have a blank vinyl jacket and I am 3-D printing my logo on it. I'm a graffiti artist and I did a *Jonah* throwie that goes on top of it, and it has dimension to it. You can even hang it on the wall. These are just ideas that I've had and it's because I have complete control. Because there's no record label red tape, it's more work but it's also more fulfilling. The work is just so much more fulfilling. CCM

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A full-page photograph of two men standing in front of a weathered brick wall. The man on the left is bald with a short beard, wearing a grey t-shirt under a teal denim jacket and black pants, with his hands in his pockets. The man on the right has a beard and is wearing a dark baseball cap, a maroon henley shirt under a dark blue zip-up hoodie, and black pants. A semi-transparent green horizontal band is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the title text.

THE BRILLIANCE

The Brilliance — Planting Seeds Of Peace

In the epicenter of all things America, **David Gungor** and **John Arndt** spring forth new messages of hope, life, and love

By Jen Rose Yokel

In the opening moments of ***All Is Not Lost***, the latest offering from **The Brilliance**, a voice cuts through the starry haze of space, gazing down upon the world: “Oh earth, oh earth... Your scars are deeper than you know.” It’s a gentle view of a troubled blue planet full of beauty and pain, and the wounded world has drawn the empathy of its Creator.

From here, **David Gungor** and **John Arndt** take us on a journey that’s a natural successor and vastly different experience from their 2015 debut ***Brother***. Brokenness and reconciliation have always been major themes in their songs, but in the aftermath of a year known for violence, fear, and a particularly contentious political atmosphere, it’s only fitting that *All Is Not Lost* steps out from the church walls and into the fractured world.

Shortly before the album’s release, we had a chance to talk with David Gungor about the big themes permeating the record, the inspiration he finds living in New York City, and how to take the first steps toward reconciliation.

CCM Magazine: *All is Not Lost seems to have this narrative arc and style that’s very different from Brother. Can you talk about that?*

David Gungor: It starts with a 100,000 foot view of Earth and its pain, and asks how you deal with the gift of life. Then there’s “Gravity Of Love” that’s very Psalm-based: “I lift my eyes unto the hills... where my helps comes from.”

“Night Has Passed” and “See The Love” are getting into how we deal with life, and in “Hear Our Prayer,” that first voice comes back from “Oh Earth,” a voice from the place of tension and pain. Which leads you into the question, “How do we fix this?”

From “Will We Ever Rise,” the album goes into the last movement, pointing you toward how we’re going to approach the idea of peace. So you get into “Who Is Jesus,” then this song about the Trinity, then “Lift Your Voice,” a song I wrote about what I want to say as a Christian: “Blessed are you weary sinner/the one who’s hope is gone.”

Then it ends on “All Is Not Lost:” “May the seeds of peace be scattered / birthing trees of shade that give us rest.” That ending is a bit of a benediction, a hopeful thing. The next album will not be a church record, but one on becoming human.

CCM: Did you create the songs with that idea in mind, or did it evolve as they were written?

DG: Before I had any of the songs, I didn’t know the route we were going to take, but I kind of knew where we wanted to end up. We wanted to get to a place of how to deal with trauma and not internalize and create more violence, but somehow instead become instruments of peace. That’s a theme throughout our work, but we’re trying to have a new language for dealing with it.

CCM: How long have you been in New York City, and how has living there influenced the songs you write?

DG: I’ve been there about three years, and yeah, I would definitely say your environment influences you. New York inspires us to keep creating, and it keeps you on your toes. You’re always being inspired by art. For instance, on my birthday I saw a great

concert and a great comedy show, and you can go see Broadway shows, all different types and forms of art.

You're forced to be shoulder to shoulder with someone that views the world totally differently from you, who may come from a totally different religious or ethnic background. And the diversity helps make healthy tension so there can be growth. No pressure, no diamonds, right? The pressure of New York brings out the best of our art.

CCM: And you lead worship at Trinity Grace Church?

DG: Yes.

CCM: What's challenging and encouraging about doing ministry there?

DG: Well, it's a very transient city, so people come in all the time trying to conquer their dreams, but New York doesn't need anybody. It'll chew you up and spit you out, so you have to be willing to get back in its mouth. [Laugh] Winters will hit you hard, the cost of living will hit you hard, there's so many different obstacles that make it tough to live in New York. But for me it works. I get my own sense of wanderlust and anxiety all the time, and the city scratches that itch of wonder because you can always do something new.

Doing ministry in that can be hard, though. People are struggling with different aspects of living in the city, and you're doing life with people who are in such different places. But for me, I love it. Just in our parish alone, there are people doing things so inspiring that I feel like I'm doing nothing, but it makes me want to be better at creating things. There's pain and challenge in that, for sure, but our church is such a gift, such a wonderful community that my wife and I love.

CCM: *In a time where everyone's talking about fear and division, I appreciate how this album acknowledges the pain and wonders how to help. Do you have any thoughts on how we as Christians can start practically doing the work of reconciliation now?*

DG: That's a wonderful question that every serious follower of Christ should ask themselves. I think it starts with learning how to listen. We are so ridiculously blessed and privileged. America



really is an amazing country, and yet, it has its own history with tragedy. So listening, and being able to see pain... Until you acknowledge pain, you can't actually speak to it.

What's hard is... How do you address things you're blind to because of privilege? How do I look for pain? Not like how can I see it and avoid it, but how do I actually look for it without being in a place where I'm like, "Oh, I'm gonna fix them," but in a place where I have compassion? Oftentimes where there is the most pain and violence, we need to ask, "Why is this happening?"

I think for America right now a huge, huge, huge issue that people only sort-of touch on is the violence going on in the south side of Chicago. It's unbelievable for America. And yet we don't really know the history and how to deal with it. And then okay, go farther out... How do we deal with what's happening in Aleppo? How do we deal with violence not only from war, but from lack of clean water?

CCM: Yeah, sometimes you can look at so much going on and it just gets overwhelming, like where do I even start?

DG: Yes. You feel that sense of, "Oh, my gosh, what do we do with this?" But it's okay to be overwhelmed, moving to a place of remembering that, "Blessed is the one whose hope is gone." And one of the unique things about being a Christian is this idea of the Incarnation, which is strength moving to weakness, light rushing into darkness, humility in its greatest form. So what do people with power do with their power? What are they responsible for? We're really trying to explore those themes. CCM

REVIEWS

February 1, 2017

CECE WINANS LET THEM FALL IN LOVE

He's Never Failed Me Yet
Run to Him
Hey Devil! (Feat. The Clark Sisters)
Peace From God
Why Me
Lowly
Never Have to Be Alone
Dancing in the Spirit
(Feat. Mezekiah Walker's
Love Fellowship Choir)
Marvelous
Let Them Fall in Love



THE GARDEN



KARI JOBE

REBA McENTIRE

Sing It Now
Songs of Faith & Hope



BRIAN & JENN

AFTER ALL THESE YEARS



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www.ccmagazine.com/magazine/issues/feb-01-2017

CeCe Winans

Let Them Fall In Love

(Puresprings Gospel/Thirty Tigers)

FOR FANS OF:

Tamela Mann, Whitney Houston,

Amy Winehouse

WE LIKE: “He Never Failed Me Yet”

★★★★★



Almost a decade since her last proper album, **CeCe Winans** builds upon her legendary status throughout ten tunes steeped in vintage influences. With some help from primary songwriter/producer (and her son) **Alvin Love III**, along with longtime collaborator **Tommy Sims** (**Garth Brooks, Michael McDonald, Bonnie Raitt**), the 10-time GRAMMY and 20-time Dove Award-winner channels everything from the golden era of girl groups to big band horns, contemporary R&B, beautiful ballads and a few trips to a tambourine-raising church.

Whether singing solo or tag teaming with **The Clark Sisters** and **Hezekiah Walker**, Winans' pristine vocals are nothing short of heaven sent as she presents both joyous praises and the ability to find hope in the darkest places.

–Andy Argyrakis

Reba McEntire

Sing It Now: Songs Of Faith & Hope

(Nash Icon Records/ Capitol CMG)

FOR FANS OF:

*Dolly Parton, Jennifer Nettles,
Martina McBride*

WE LIKE: "I'll Fly Away"

★★★★★



Believe it or not, in her four decades of leading country music with 35 chart-topping singles and 56 million albums sold, **Reba McEntire** has never recorded a gospel collection until now. But she's more than making up for lost time with this double disc set split between hymns redone Reba style and new tunes of inspiration.

McEntire co-produces the entire spread alongside **Rascal Flatts' Jay DeMarcus** and her band leader/ musical director **Doug Sisemore**, resulting in a sound that straddles southern gospel, classic country, pop and contemporary Christian with a message that boldly lives up to its title on literally every single stirring occasion.

–Andy Argyrakis

Kari Jobe
The Garden

(Sparrow)

FOR FANS OF:

Brooke Fraser, Christy Nockels

WE LIKE: “The Garden”

★★★★☆



Dove Award-winning artist **Kari Jobe** should garner a few more once ***The Garden*** finds a home deep in the hearts of critics and her many fans. Borne from a season of birth and death, *The Garden* speaks from a wide emotional range with the sort of quiet intensity for which Jobe is known.

The title track opens the album with a tone-setting reflection on God’s work in the garden of our lives, and soon-to-be favorites like “Heal Our Land” continues to offer hopeful reminders of God’s presence and peace in the midst of painful seasons. *The Garden* is an honest album from a trusted artist destined to be a friend at our weakest moments.

—Matt Conner

Brian & Jenn Johnson

After All These Years

(Bethel Music)

FOR FANS OF:

Bethel Music, Matt Redman

WE LIKE: “Mercy And Majesty”

★★★★☆



Brian and **Jenn Johnson**, the co-founders of **Bethel Music**, certainly know a thing or two about powerful worship anthems. After spending the bulk of their vocational time raising up exciting new worship leaders and inspirational voices, the time has come for another release from the duo.

After All These Years is the resulting release, filled with dynamic vertical songs that connect the heart of the listener with the heart of God. The slow synth build of “Mention Of Your Name” shows that style is nearly as important as the substance on *After All These Years*, while “Mercy And Majesty” should find itself in healthy congregational rotation. The album is another way in which the Johnsons continue to nurture the church.

–Matt Conner

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Anthony Evans

Back to Life

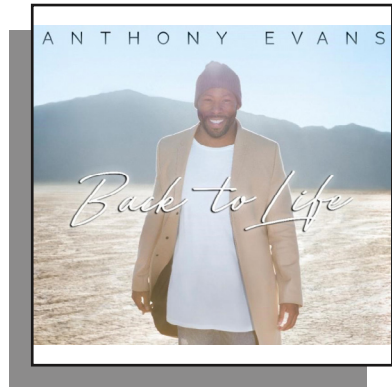
(Sherman James Productions)

FOR FANS OF:

Kirk Franklin, William McDowell

WE LIKE: "See You Again"

★★★★☆



The powerful voice and ministry of **Anthony Evans** likely needs no introduction given his stellar resume, but the veteran artist and performer has never sounded as strong as he does on the slickly produced ***Back To Life***. From the outset of "See You Again," Evans' strong tenor vocal is allowed to shine on numerous hope-filled anthems.

While no song measures up to the album's opener, it's more a testament to such a charismatic beginning than a knock on the rest of *Back To Life*. Other favorites should include the inspirational title track and the smooth gospel groove of "Incredible." Evans should expect to add another round of awards to his trophy case in a career that's already as notable as nearly anyone in gospel music

—Matt Conner



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