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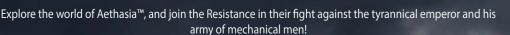
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# 

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#### **Colton Dixon**

How did a season of introspection reveal simple truths about Christ's love for this pop star, cultural figure, and newlywed?



#### **Aaron Shust**

Always quick to shrug-off any spotlight, the beloved songwriter-worship leader continually thrives in and through unknowns and insecurities



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The spaces between the notes are where Brian and Jenn Johnson of Bethel Music currently dwell, an intentional movement of stillness



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I'll get to the reason behind the definition above in a moment, so don't let the following be a *distraction* for you—uhh, thank you...[takes a bow].

*Do words even matter?* That question was posed in a video that I watched this week from publisher **Thomas Nelson** as they unveiled their new **Comfort Print Bible**. In the same week, my pastor touched on a word during his sermon that struck me like never before: *distraction*. A word I have probably used my entire life, but never really focused on the biggest part of it: *traction*.

As those behind the development of the *Comfort Print Bible* aimed to create a typeface that keeps readers more easily engaged, allow me to highlight some parallels between these two that I just couldn't shake from my mind this week: A word is nothing but a series of letters put together in a logical order—each of those letters has a feel, a personality, we call that character stated **Klaus Krogh** of 2**K/DENMARK**. "Put together," "logical order..." to me, this describes being on track, and when we're on track with Christ we develop real character.

**Heidi Rand Sorenson** said of the typeface, that it's a precise tool for communication & comprehension—it helps the readers eyes flow easily & uninterrupted. A distraction is an interruption—when we're off track, we are interrupted from doing what God wants us to do, communication with Him, a deeper understanding.

**Johannes Krejberg Haahr** said, a poor typeface imposes unnecessary cognitive workload, eyestrain, fatigue—a well-designed typeface creates enjoyment and better understanding, keeping the reader focused on the text. Distracting words: "imposing," "unnecessary," "fatigue"—can we relate to these when we are off track? Ah, but when we're not distracted, when we're on track, we are so focused—and life is full of enjoyment!

So, what is currently preventing us from giving our full attention to God—what has us off track? Perhaps we can use more of His Words this week to bring us closer to the path?



Blessings,

**Kevin Sparkman** Editor, *CCM Magazine* KSparq@CCMMagazine.com

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# Colton Dixon

### Colton Dixon — Super-Seeker

How did a season of introspection reveal simple truths about Christ's love and how to apply it to his crazy day-to-day life as pop star, cultural figure, and newlywed?

By Kevin Sparkman

**1 Chronicles 16:11** says, Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always. Psalm 14:2, The Lord looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. Hosea 10:12b, for it is time to seek the Lord, until he comes and showers his righteousness on you.

It is also written, This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (**Romans 3:22-23**).

So, how has the term "seeker" acquired such a negative connotation within today's Christian culture? An ongoing and active pursuit of Christ should not only be words that describe us as believers, but also a badge of honor. For **Colton Dixon**, it is this constant pursuit that both filled a season of seeking the Lord for his own life and completely inspired his latest project described as a concept album—titled *Identity* that recently released on March 24, 2017 (**Sparrow Records**).

There's also a stigma behind the term "concept album" that immediately conjures the sights and sounds of **The Life Of Chris Gaines**, eighteen-minute long **Genesis** epics, and the alwayshilarious "Jazz Odyssey" scene. We don't think of Identity as much of a "concept," rather a thematic response set to three distinct movements: Mind, Body, and Soul. These basic elements are representative of Dixon's journey to get back into "a closer walk with Thee."

The anthems that lie within the aptly named *Identity* all ultimately point us to Christ's love, which Dixon's discovery says is the foundation of everything. If anything, the moments on this album—which are just as inspiring sonically as thematically should serve as a great reminder for us all to humbly seek after God. Daily.

> Just a closer walk with Thee, Grant it, Jesus, is my plea, Daily walking close to Thee, Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.

### CCM Magazine: Take us to the beginning and how this project ended up becoming more of a concept-type album, an album of three distinct movements.

**Colton Dixon:** I feel like it's been a long time coming. It's been over a year that I've had this idea in my head. It started with a different title, but with the same original concepts. It basically came from looking back and seeing areas of my life that were slowly eating away at me—and not even really realizing it. That's why God gave us His Word. He reveals those things to us, which allows us to see and nip them in the bud, and to then focus our attention back on the right things. Also, as it relates to the album title, realizing that I had placed my identity in things that didn't really matter—a refocusing of my life and emptying the toolbox, so to speak. Maybe it was things that I had learned growing up that possibly weren't even true. Sometimes we have to do that just to gather up the tools that we need to use. It was kind-of a spiritual journey for me. I split the record into three sections: Mind, Body, and Spirit to dive deeper into each specific area. That's a little behind the overall concept behind *Identity*.

# CCM: Can you give us more insight into your interpretations of the Mind, Body, and Spirit as it was intended for Identity?

**CD:** For sure. I think a lot of us have heard those three terms used together. Ultimately, they are what makes up our identity. [On the album] I really wanted to start with the Mind, because that's where an idea comes from. It's the starting point in making an action, if that makes sense. You're going to think about something before you actually do it. In this section I present a few topics for the listener. I want to get them thinking and opened to what God has for them. Talk about taking your thoughts captive, every song pertains to the mind. I love that.

Next is the Body, and it's really about challenging us to become the person that God has called us to be. There's a song on the Deluxe Version called "Warriors" that speaks to this. My wife and I got to visit Samoa for Thanksgiving last year and learned how that is a big part of their culture. The men are warriors. They have a tradition called the Siva Tau, a tribal war dance and chant that we actually used on the top of the track. That was really cool and I think it goes along with the song pretty well.

Then finally we go into the Spirit. It was honestly one of the harder lessons I had to learn—that is to stop and to listen to God and what He has for you. That is counter-culture to us, especially here in America. We want things now. It's a hard thing to do sometimes, but God does speak to us when we're still. He



doesn't always use a loud voice or bring someone along to give a "Here's-your-sign moment." Sometimes it's that still, small voice on the narrow road and we have to be paying close attention to catch it.

CCM: You have said, "In life we tend to get caught up in that never ending cycle...we can never really reach those expectations that we think we have to or try to meet." Was there a definitive moment where this became real for you that kind-of stopped you in your tracks?

**CD:** For sure. Not to plug the single, but that's what "All That Matters" is all about. What's so beautiful about the way we're structured with God is that He gave us a choice. In that choice, it's almost like He doesn't expect us to change at all—He just wants to be in relationship with us. What happens is the more and more I fall in love with God, the more and more I want to change. I think it's so cool the way that works.

It's not necessarily like, "Here's this standard," and not living up it. No, it's like I just want to continue to fall more and more in love with Jesus. In doing that, I'm going to be convicted on things, and He may reveal it by asking, "Is there a better way to do this?" Overall, it's a bit deeper, but basically all that matters sometimes is that it's good to be reminded that we do matter. There are a lot of people on earth and it's easy to think, "Maybe He's just not listening to me today?" It's not true. God is everywhere. He loves it when we just reach out to Him.

> Through this world of toil and snares, If I falter, Lord, who cares? Who with me my burden shares? None but Thee, dear Lord, none but Thee.

Someone told me that they compared it to a mom or dad or a grandparent-figure who calls every once in a while to say, "Just checking in on you." But when you call first, they just light up—it completely makes their week. That was a cool picture for me. God just wants that kind of relationship with us. When we choose Him over something else, I see that picture. I just want to fall more in love with God every day. I know my life will change as a result of just doing that.

### CCM: You write Psalm 119 into the lyrics of that song, then you end that by stating, "Your love is my identity," which both emphasizes that big moment in the song and the album's overall theme...

**CD:** I've always loved that scripture—it's so visual. I'm a very visual songwriter, even with just song titles. It's funny, I've had that verse in my back pocket for a long time. I've been like, "All right, when it fits, I'm going to be really stoked to use it," and I think it's perfect for this song. You've experienced high points and low points, but at the end of the day, we just need to look at His Word because it is a guideline. *Your Word is a lamp unto my feet, a light unto my path.* More importantly, just the love that God has for us, that's what I'm going to cling to. His love is my identity.

### CCM: Any other scriptures that are particularly resonating with you right now?

**CD: 2 John 1:9**. It talks about us as creative beings, but being careful not to go out ahead of the will of God. That hit me square in the face. When you're in an industry where people encourage you to be as creative as you possibly can be, it's easy to come up with an idea and start running with it before you pray or ask God, "Is this the best thing for me right now?" I just think it's so



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Order today at www.risenmagazine.com important that everything is God-breathed and God-initiated. A lot of things are, but man, you can work for something that maybe God has for you, but it might not be the right time. You might have a different experience if you had waited on God's timing.

The coolest story behind that is there's a 4th grade teacher that comes to a lot of shows. She had her students write a bunch of notes for me and a few other artists. One of her students said, "Hey, I really like this song because of this reason, and that song because of that reason..." Very sharp kid, then at the end of it he wrote, "I read this verse and thought it would mean a lot to you," and it was 2 John 1:9. I was like, "What in the world?" This kid is just mature beyond his years. I love that God can use anyone He wants. It doesn't matter the age, the gender, the race or whatever. I just love that.

CCM: There are always critics out there, especially with what we do in contemporary Christian music, art, and media, etc. How do you think your work stands up against those who may claim hints of inauthenticity—or use an artist's 'success' as a negative?

**CD:** Honestly I think it goes back to how you define success. I haven't always looked at it this way. I'm sure there are still times I put it in the wrong place, but I don't make music for anyone else except for God. Sure, I like be creative and I love to have fun. Do I want people to enjoy [my work]? Absolutely, but I can't put all my chips in that basket because ultimately there are going to be people who don't like it.

I shouldn't do this—after all I am human and an artist—but I've read the comments on iTunes or on YouTube or whatever and you read things like, "He's selling out. He's not doing the 'rockthing' anymore." Or, on the flip side, you have people who didn't like the first two records who liked Identity. You win some and you lose some. Again, it goes back to, "How do you define success?" Is it defined it in popularity, fame, or money? I'm trying not to.

I think I am a success story. I think God put a desire in my heart and He made it come true for me. I don't know about you, but that seems like success to me. I'm banking on that. I love what I get to do. I'll do it for as long as God allows me to.

### CCM: Congratulations on your first year of marriage (January). As we discuss our identity, you have stated before that your relationship with Annie doesn't define who you are. It seems a lot of young people can get hung up on that concept...

**CD:** I can't let my wife define who I am. It goes back to, "Where do you put your identity?" I think it's very easy to put that in a relationship—or in your popularity, the kind of house you're in, what you do for a living, or whatever "it" may be. Going back to Psalm 119, it's His love that should be our identity.

I just want to be known for being a representation of what God has done. It's really about sharing that love that God has for me. Marriage is great. My wife Annie and I both love marriage. She gets to come out on the road with me, which is a blessing, and makes it even better.

One of the things we realized very quickly, whether we wanted to or not, is that marriage is all about having a servant's posture. What I mean by that is, every day is a new opportunity to serve the other person. You just have to have that mindset and you hope and pray that the other person is also on the same page. It's all about, "How can I meet your needs in this area, or that area?" As a man of the house, I need to make sure that I'm not only taking care of myself, but I'm taking care of another person as well. Then when we have kids, we're taking care of them as well. That's a crazy thing to think about!

People are human and they're going to make mistakes. When your identity is not in another person or when we upset each other, it's so much easier to love the person for who they are —so much easier. My wife is amazing. But when you put your identity in Christ, it's so much easier to live life to the fullest, to love people where they are and to take things as they come with a Christ-like mentality.

> I am weak, but Thou art strong; Jesus, keep me from all wrong; I'll be satisfied as long As I walk, let me walk close to Thee. □□M

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# Aaron Shust



### Aaron Shust — Finding A Way

Always quick to shrug-off any spotlight, the beloved songwriter-worship leader continually thrives in and through unknowns and insecurities

By Matt Conner

**Aaron Shust** had done all of this before. He's been in and out of the studio for well over a decade. He's performed in venues of all kinds from coast to coast on countless tours. Yet combining the experiences into his first live album recording, the newly released *Love Made A Way* (Centricity Music), was something different altogether—a "nerve-wracking" recording session.

Fortunately, the emotions gave way and the studio time yielded the same thing Shust always produces: a beautiful worship experience. *Love Made A Way* combines familiar favorites with worship covers and brand new songs for an intimate yet powerful worship set. We recently spoke with Shust about his song choices, the emotions in the studio and how he almost refused his way out of a musical career in the first place.

### CCM Magazine: This is your first live recording. How did that feel compared to previous recording experiences?

**Aaron Shust:** It was nerve-wracking. I've already watched the videos and I know myself more than anyone else, so of course I can see what other people will not. Even my wife didn't think I was nervous, but I'm watching myself the whole time knowing I'm thinking about the chords here or singing the right words there, because some of these are brand new songs. I did my

due diligence to go over the new songs ad nauseum at home so that the lyrics were second nature, but it still didn't help. It's like when you go to a party and have to introduce someone and you lose their name.

There's just something about the live experience with the camera right up in your face that you realize there's no going back. There's safety in a studio recording where you can run a pass twenty times and pick your favorite. However, on the other end of the spectrum is that there's so much energy in the room. The band had played through the set a couple times and the crowd came in for that last night. We were in a studio, not a church setting, but you can make music and worship anywhere, so that's what we did.

The energy in the worship that day was amazing. My wife was in the front row, and the ability to watch someone I know and love become so engaged with the Heavenly Father in worship through a song that we'd written just a couple weeks earlier, or a song we'd been singing for ten years, was pretty powerful.

### CCM: What was the impetus for a live release?

**AS:** Nothing flashy, really. I've had friends over the years ask me about making a live record, so it's always been in the back of my mind, but I've never brought it to the table. This time, the label brought it to me and said, "For this next album, we think you should consider doing a live record." I think because enough people over the years had said that I should, I didn't fight them on it, even though I knew some of those insecurities I just described would pop up.

My life has been a series of stepping into the unknown or into where I'm insecure. One example I can think of was when I was a senior, I think, in college. It was a Christian school with chapel every day and we always sang two hymns before someone would preach. At that point, they decided to incorporate some praise choruses and arbitrarily they came to me as a vocal major with a piano minor and asked me to lead some worship songs. This wasn't something that I did. I didn't know worship songs and had never led worship, so I just said, "No thank you. I'm honored but that's not what I do."

They kept pushing me. I pushed back long enough until I felt convicted that I was supposed to step into this with zero experience or confidence. Then it became a part of my life and something that I love to do. So when I'm approached by something that I'm nervous about doing but enough people are encouraging me to do it, I'm willing to step into it with fear and trepidation. Stepping into this live album was a similar experience to me.

### CCM: There are a number of new songs next to some older favorites on this album, right?

**AS:** I certainly did not want to make a live "best of" album. I wanted to make sure there was new material, since I'm always writing and there's an excitement when playing new stuff. The excitement of new music is in the process of writing it. Just yesterday, I had the house to myself at home and I was playing songs I've written with other people just this year—songs that no one else has heard except the other writers and the publisher. It was such an intimate time of worship with just me and the Lord with a song that's brand new. Who knows if it's going to be successful? Who knows if it will ever be heard? There's something very precious about that.



It might eventually get chosen to be on a recording and the people within the record label and the publishers will hear it, but there's something so special about having a song at that stage where it's not been critiqued, when it's just you and the Lord with these songs. It might not be special in terms of commercial viability but the Lord doesn't care about that. When an album is released, it's like that line from **Polar Express** where the boy's going to sleep in the beginning and **Tom Hanks**' character says, "It's the end of the magic." [Laughs] That's how it feels when an album is released.

### CCM: So how did you know what to pick?

**AS:** We made a plan from the beginning to have five pre-existing songs, basically the songs I do in my set from the last ten or eleven years. Obviously, we had to do "My Savior My God" and "My Hope Is In You." I've been doing "God Of Brilliant Lights" for a long time. I love playing that song. Recently I'd covered **Hillsong UNITED**'s "Cornerstone" and **Bethel Music**'s "Ever Be." Those will be standards for a long time because they're well loved songs. Doing all of these songs the way we performed them live was special, especially "My Savior My God." We've really never performed it the way it was originally recorded in 2004, so it was nice to get a different recording out there.

When it comes to songs like "Cornerstone" or "Ever Be," I always love finding songs that are bubbling up within the church that are meaningful to me and recording those as well. I want to bring the feeling of worship into my concerts. "Death Was Arrested" is a song that was born at **North Point Church**. It's the same thing with "Resurrecting" from **Elevation Church**.



It's not all about having to write a song. Ten years ago, I really struggled with that. I only wanted to record songs that I wrote. On my second album, I was willing to co-write a bit. Over the years, I hope it's a sign of maturity that I'm open to more and more co-writes or even covering songs that I love. I just want to craft the best worship experience possible for the people who listen to my albums—even if that means I had nothing to do with the writing of the song.

### CCM: You mentioned that you had to include songs like "My Savior My God." Are you surprised by the life that some songs have taken and the fact that you'll likely have to play that as long as you continue to make music?

**AS:** When I say that I'm not surprised, it's not because I did a good job writing the song at all. Let's be very clear about that. I believe that if God wants to place his hand of blessing on a thing, it's going to accomplish His will. In a completely mundane sense, I am absolutely surprised because it is from an old hymn called "I Am Not Skilled To Understand" by **Dora Greenwell**. They're lyrics that impacted me out of an old hymnal, so much so that I wanted to share those words through song with my own people when I was a worship leader. I didn't even know the melody, but I was so moved to share it that I wrote a simple melody to make it as accessible as possible. I wanted people to be able to grab onto it quickly.

In that sense, I wasn't trying to create a piece of art. I wasn't even signed to a record label at the time. I just wanted to write a song that my church could sing, because it would be healing to their hearts, to admit that we're not skilled to understand all of the mysteries of God. Instead, we're going to trust that he loves me, that he's alive, that he'll always be there for me. That's the goal. I never get tired of singing it and I know there are people who need to hear it every time I perform.



# Brian & Jenn Johnson



www.ccmmagazine.com/magazine/issues/apr-01-2017

### Brian Johnson — Resounding Silence

The spaces between the notes are where Brian and Jenn Johnson of Bethel Music currently dwell, an intentional movement of stillness

By Matt Conner

The last ten years have brought a myriad of change for **Brian** and **Jenn Johnson**. The husband and wife team behind **Bethel Music** have watched their own career give way to facilitating an entire worship movement. While they've still been writing songs, they're also mentoring worship leaders and watching God use the talent of Bethel to establish a global presence.

Now the duo is back with their brand new album, *After All These Years*, an intimate devotional album influenced by silence. It's also a response to the overwhelming demands and stress felt by the Johnsons in the years between albums. In the midst of God's blessing, Brian describes his own nervous breakdown and the subsequent lessons learned about reliance on God.

We recently asked Brian more about the mood and songs on the new album, and where he sees worship music heading in the next few years.

### CCM Magazine: There's an immediate atmosphere that the new album creates. Was that something you were wanting to create?

**Brian Johnson:** While we enjoy a lot of music, we also don't listen to a lot of music at times because we live on a farm. Our life is music, so for us, downtime is more silent. In a sense, this

album was something we wanted to feel more like silence. There's a lot of noise out there, which isn't bad, but for us, it's more of a devotional expression. For instance, with the strings, we wanted a big string orchestra because it feels more classic that way. We didn't have to have drums. We didn't want electric guitar. We wanted to strip a lot of that away that we'd normally use to create that silence, in a sense, when it comes to music. We love silence. We wanted this to be about the heart, about reconnection with God.

### CCM: So it's learning to restrain yourself from using the bells and whistles available to you?

**BJ:** Yeah, and a lot of it was the producers were also helping to lead the charge. We had an original idea to use the strings and do something different, so in order to build the song, we had to learn to do that without the bass, drums, and electric guitar. All of the songs we write would feel amazing to ramp a chorus up and launch it, but we decided to go the opposite route. It was a challenge, but we wanted something that you could play in the background or keep it up front during a devotional time, a soaking time or a pre-service prayer.

It's a departure from what we often do on our compilations, which are these big worship anthems. I think those are awesome. I love it all, but we just wanted something different. We often feel that silence is not okay, that silence is awkward. We feel a pressure to fill it with noise, but you can make it so silence isn't awkward and people can gather their thoughts and recollect and refocus on central things to achieve.

I had a nervous breakdown a year-and-a-half ago and a lot of these songs came out of that time to get ahold of God. I'll tell you what, sometimes we can miss God and then we're just going through the motions and doing what normally works. But when you come to the point in your life where like I was in the hospital and could not breathe...consider it a gift when God becomes your only option.

### CCM: Are you able to avoid getting there again?

**BJ:** I'll preach on this where I'll blow up a balloon and tell everyone that obviously, at some point, this balloon is going to pop. If someone says something offense or there's a relational fallout that you don't take care of or you have some stress, it all begins to add to the pressure in that balloon. Eventually if you don't take care of that pressure, it will blow up on you. We are not God. No man can possibly carry all of that. We're not supposed to carry it. We're supposed to give it to the One who died for all of that.

I know forgiveness and bitterness and injustice. We run the label and we have a big department and there's just so much going, right? We were seven years in and I just didn't see it coming. It just hit me out of nowhere one day, and I couldn't breathe. I was shaking. It was horrible. So I've learned that I just have to stay in my lane. You can only get done in a day what God has called us to get done in a day, and everyone can carry that weight. But a lot of times, we end up taking on too much and we can put that on the people who work for us.

I'll tell you this, personally, what is so helpful for me is having a personal devotional time with God. I have to have that devotional time with God. It's not every single morning, but several times a week, I'll get up early and make my coffee and I've got my little lamp and my desk and I just start reading. It's the most tangible, practical thing I tell people they can do. It's literally like having your car on empty and then filling it up with gas. I have to liter-



ally approach it like my life depends on it.

### CCM: You're so deeply involved with Bethel Music and you've had the chance to work with and mentor so many worship leaders. What trends are you seeing for worship music's future and what would you like to see happen?

**BJ:** I think the space has become really crowded, but that's not a bad thing. In the past, when a song hit the CCLI top ten, it would stay there for a long time. Those songs would be sung over and over for a while. Now, those songs come and go a lot more, but there's some good things about that. There's a fresh expression of what God is doing, and you can quickly see what God is doing with social media and how communication and information gets put out there. It spans the globe. It's crazy.

The fruit of that is God can put His hand on a song and reach the entire planet. You know when you listen to a hymn, it can feel like Heaven is actually on some of those hymns? You feel closer to eternity when you're singing some of those hymns. It's like God puts His stamp or wink or nod on some songs. I feel that way even about "10,000 Reasons (Bless The Lord)" because there's just something on the song. There's something that God has done with that song. He takes our simple melodies or our simple progressions and He puts His supernatural power on that and it goes around the world in a day and changes lives. It reminds people why they're alive and gives them the courage to live their lives. It's a mind-blowing thing to me.

I think there are a lot more songs that will become runways into prophetic moments, where you sing a song and it can't help but evoke a response from the church that just sang it. It's a runway into the more of God, into a personal outburst of praise, into spontaneous overflow of praise that happens when someone really realizes they are forgiven, just for example. So instead of a lot of noise or a lot of the same-old, which is not bad, there will be moments with these songs that pop through and provide a perspective the world really needs right now.

# CCM: Are you hitting the road to support this project or are you too busy running everything?

**BJ:** I don't know if we'll do an After All These Years Tour. I'm going to Asia in three weeks with the team for a 10-day tour and I'll do a few songs from the album in my set. It's a compilation so we do songs from all of the albums each night. I don't know if we'll do a tour like you're talking about. We're so not set up that way. [Laughs] My wife is slowing way down this year in terms of traveling, but I'm traveling more than ever. But we don't necessarily have to, because we have a lot of other people who carry the songs.

### CCM: What songs will you likely play during the set?

**BJ:** I'll do "Only Jesus" for sure every night. I'll probably do "After All These Years." Those two for sure. If Jenn was there, she does "Mention Of Your Name" and "For The One." I might do "For The One" as well.

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### Jaci Velasquez *Trust/Confío* (Integrity Music) FOR FANS OF: Crystal Lewis, Rachael Lampa, Gloria Estefan WE LIKE: "Sound Of Your Kingdom" ★★★★☆



On her first full-length project in more than five years, Jaci Velasquez showcases her personal and worshipful side with contemporary-Latin pop stylings and a lovely voice that sounds like it's barely taken a break. The singer-songwriter's Integrity Music debut actually comes in two forms, the entirely English *Trust* and its Spanish companion *Confío*, though no matter one's primary language, the selections come from a *Heavenly Place* (to quote the title of her platinum-plus national debut from 1996).

Throughout it all, Velasquez repeatedly offers praises and speaks of her entire surrender to the Lord, including juggling her role as the wife of fellow recording artist **Nic Gonzales** (of **Salvador** fame), a mother of two young boys (including one with special needs) and a traveling musician who continues to attract international acclaim.

-Andy Argyrakis

Selah Unbreakable (Curb Records) FOR FANS OF: David Phelps, Josh Groban, Avalon WE LIKE: "Broken Ladders" ★★★★☆



Vocal trio **Selah**, currently comprised of **Todd Smith**, **Allan Hall** and **Amy Perry**, return with their first noncompilation collection in nearly three years. The results find the eight-time Dove Award-winners turning in an inspirational batch split between originals, covers of fellow Christian artists and a selection of classic hymns.

The variety-filled project includes the group's first-ever flirtation with '80s-centric dance beats on the bubbly title cut, the African-influenced "This Little Light Of Mine (He Will Shine)" and a clever combination of "Got Any Rivers" with lauded singer-songwriter **Leslie Phillips**' "Carry You." Add in some production by **Charlie Peacock** and a guest appearance by **Ron Block** of **Alison Krauss** & Union Station (to name but a few of the many noteworthy collaborations), and Selah soars back even more *Unbreakable* than before.

-Andy Argyrakis

Various

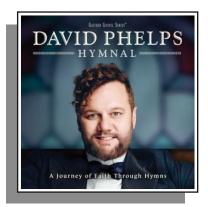
The Case For Christ: Songs Inspired By The Motion Picture (Dream Records) FOR FANS OF: Israel Houghton, Soulfire Revolution WE LIKE: "Your Love" ★★★ ☆☆



Various worship leaders and worship teams from churches all over the United States have come together to form the soundtrack for the new feature film, *The Case For Christ*. J.T. Murell, worship pastor at Lifechurch.tv, sings the title track, a creedal chorus for the Christian faith. Several other songs follow suit with titles like "The Evidence" and a trio of belief-centric songs: "Believe," "I Believe" and "I Believe You Are Christ."

**Christian Ross**' slower offering "Your Moment Has Come" ushers listeners into a decisive moment after hearing the lyrical statements of faith, providing a listening experience that culminates with an invitation, much like its source material.

David Phelps Hymnal (Spring House) FOR FANS OF: Gaither Vocal Band WE LIKE: "It Is Well" ★★★★☆



The musical prelude that opens **David Phelps**' new album, *Hymnal*, serves as a sonic forerunner for what the listener can expect from this 18-track set. Phelps' presence already guarantees an incredible vocal performance, and the title succinctly tells the album's inspiration and content, but the eclectic prelude eventually gives way to a wider variety of arrangements than you might expect.

The plaintive "In The Garden" is followed by the punchy strings of "How Great Thou Art." A spirited "Battle Hymn Of The Republic" comes before an a cappella version of "Amazing Grace." Phelps' vocal is the highlight, especially on "It Is Well," and longtime **Gaither Vocal Band** fans will love this new hymns project from one of the most talented singers in the industry.

GAWVI We Belong (Reach Records) FOR FANS OF: Andy Mineo, KB WE LIKE: "The Sickness" ★★★★★



Anchored by the incredible talents of **Lecrae** (and bolstered by **Tedashii**, **KB** and **Andy Mineo**), **Reach Records** has become a home for music that drives pop culture. **GAWVI** is the latest artistic feather in Reach's musical cap, a hip hop producer turned dance-pop artist whose sonic chops are second to none.

Two EPs in 2016 showed off the savvy synth-based tunes to come on **We Belong**, but nothing could prepare for the killer hooks of songs like "Rock N Roll" and "Closer." The former would make **The Weeknd** jealous and the latter somehow straddles the line of inspirational worship and pulsing dance number. GAWVI's strong solo artistic turn is another win for Reach and an enjoyable listen for all of us.

David Baloche Labyrinth (Integrity Music) FOR FANS OF: Daniel Bashta, The Brilliance WE LIKE: "Come To Me" ★★★★☆



A prayer labyrinth can often be found in sacred spaces, ancient or modern, for a person to experience an internal journey as they move through a set of stations into the center, a move from outward thinking to internal focus.

**David Baloche** (yes, he is **Paul**'s son) has released a sonic version with the ethereal soundscapes on *Labyrinth*, an album comprised of minimal, inviting soundscapes that frame scriptural reminders to help the listener consider and contemplate biblical references of hope and healing. This is an experiential album, a true spiritual help that offers 10 tracks that minister to both the head and heart.

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