

Joyful noise

By [Louis R. Carlozo](#) in the [June 1, 2004](#) issue

In Review



Rain

New Direction
GospoCentric



Circles

The Autumn Defense

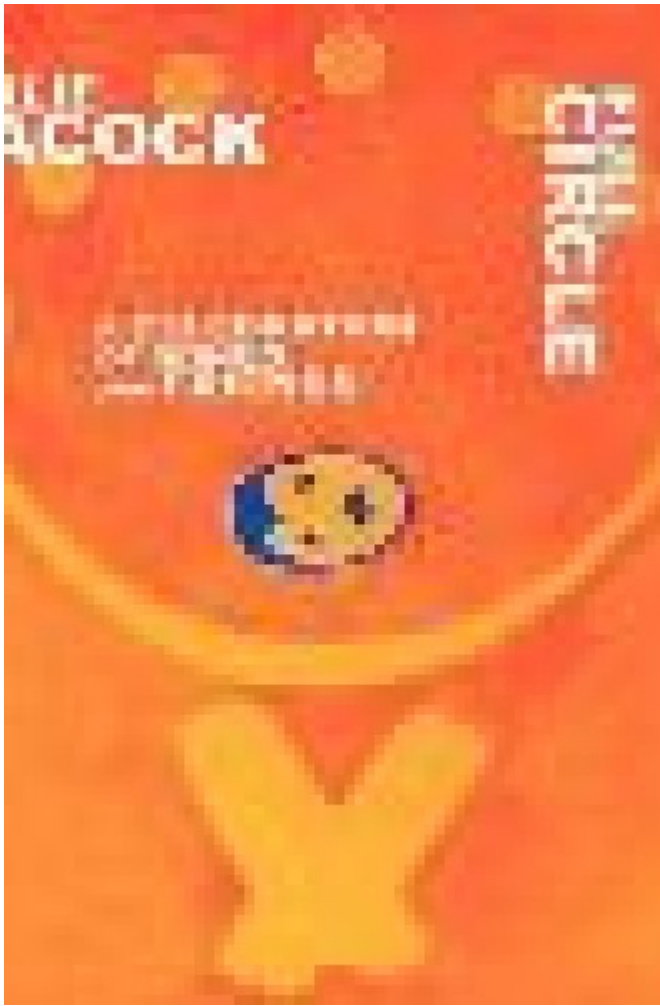
Arena rock



Foly! Live Around the World

Habib Koité & Bamada

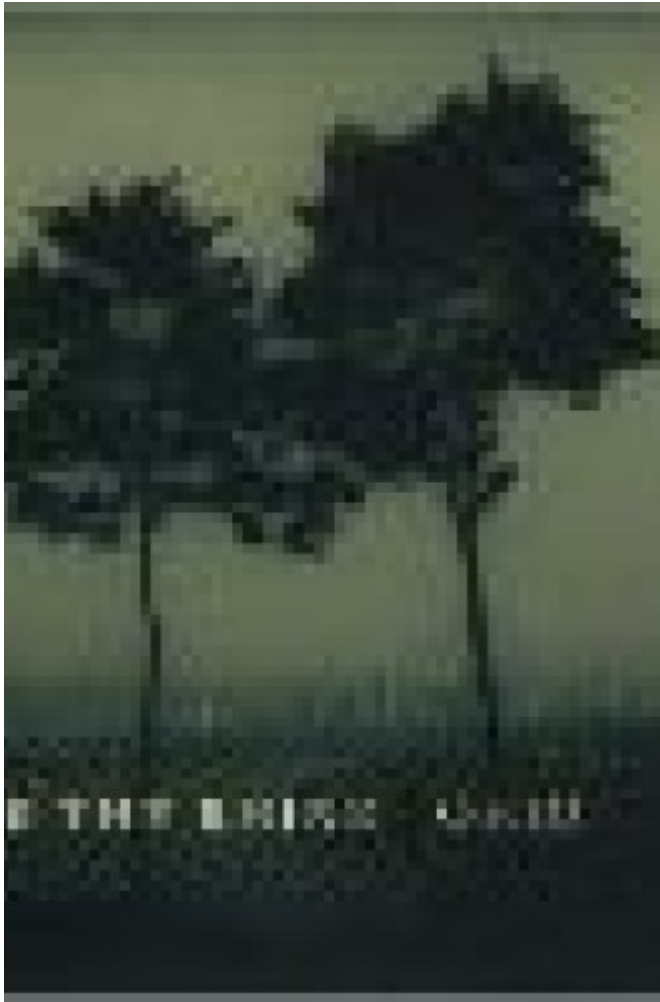
World Village



Full Circle: A Celebration of Songs and Friends

Charlie Peacock, various artists

Sparrow



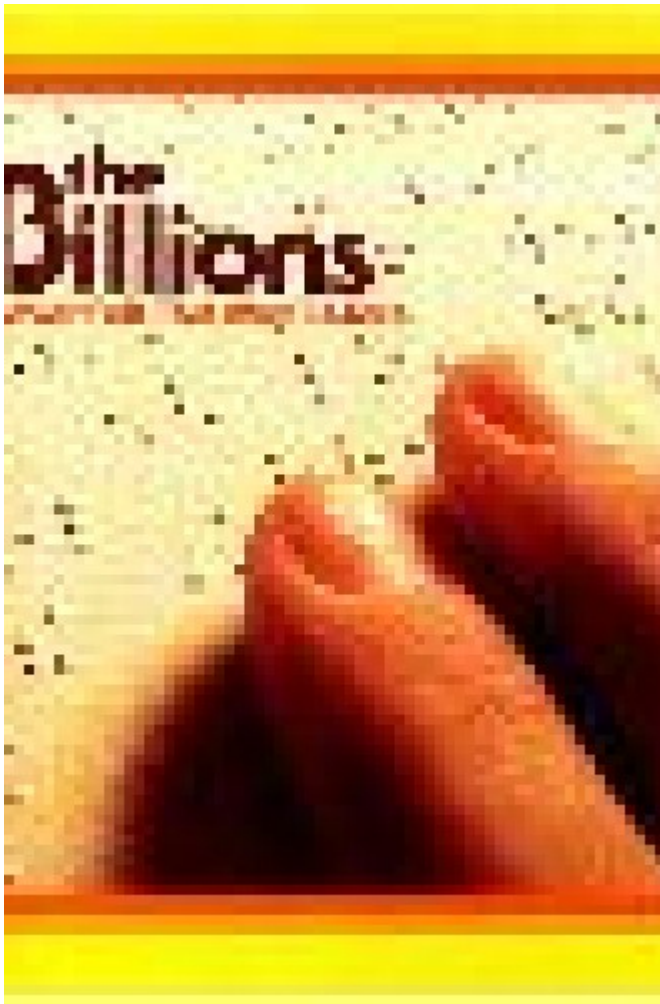
Ohio

Over the Rhine
Backporch/Virgin



Songs for Dustmites

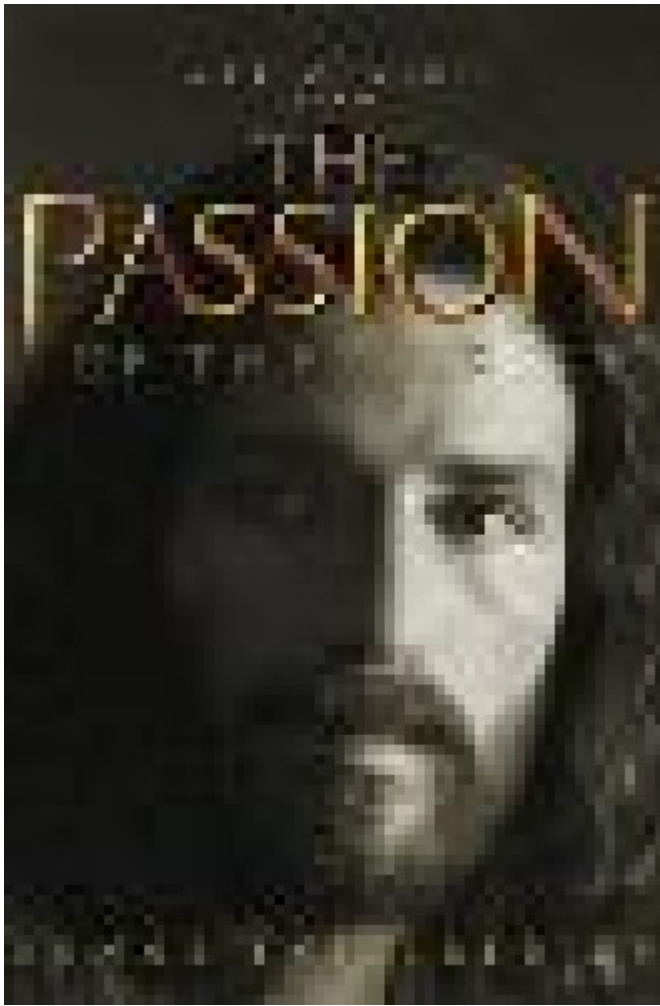
Steve Burns
PIAS America



Never Felt This Way Before

The Billions

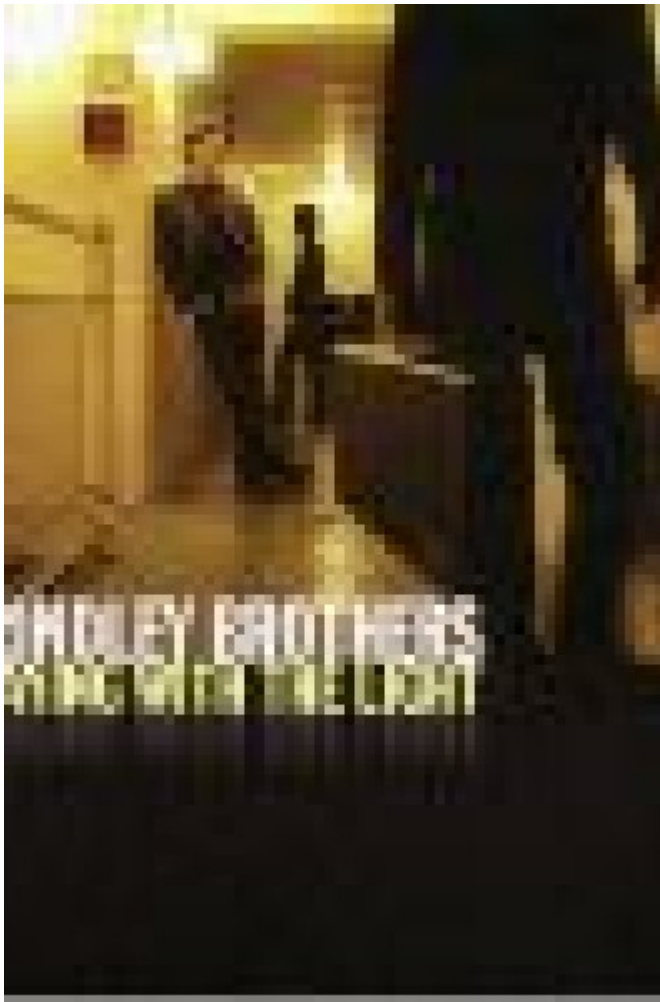
Northern



Songs Inspired by 'The Passion of the Christ'

various artists

Universal South



Playing with the Light

Brindley Brothers

Paste



The Other Side of Something

Sara Groves

Sponge/INO



Bittertown

Lori McKenna
Signature Sounds



Bittertown

Lori McKenna
Signature Sounds



Take Five

Two for Brazil
Jazzmin

Spanning the sonic globe, this roundup of recent albums highlights compelling music in different genres. Alongside some popular names are lesser-known artists who deserve notice. Only some are explicitly Christian. What caught my attention were challenging lyrics, an uplifting spirit—or simply a joyful noise.

This youth gospel choir's debut, *Get Your Praise On*, was nothing short of magical. It put the group in the same class as the much-acclaimed God's Property. New Direction proves the debut was no fluke, melding R&B beats worthy of Prince or Kirk Franklin with lush, thrilling gospel harmony. Horns, wah-wah guitars and organ swirls set the stage on the opening track, aptly named "New Direction."

Fans of the four classic rock Bs—Beatles, Beach Boys, Byrds and Big Star—will find this dreamy pop confection overflowing with lilting hooks and shimmering harmonies. A collaboration between Wilco bassist John Stirratt and producer Pat Sansone, the disc manages to sound heartfelt without stooping to sentiment, as on “The Answer,” a song that couples a hypnotic acoustic guitar arpeggio with Abbey Road-style harmonies and a lovely string arrangement.

Born into a family of West African griots, or oral storytellers, this singer-guitarist from Mali brings a distinct flavor to Afropop (his influences run the gamut from American soul to British art pop). This double disc, culled from live recordings, boasts infectious dance energy and brains to match. One cut, “Cigarette Abana,” became an antismoking anthem in Koité’s native land.

To mark 20 years as a Christian music producer and solo artist, Peacock teamed with some 20 artists to yield a retrospective album that, while at times overly eclectic, crackles with celebratory spirit. Guests include the three members of dc talk (who appear separately) and jazz banjo picker Bela Fleck, who backs up Peacock on the album’s peak flight: a rustic version of “In the Light” that sounds like it fell off the back of a Carolina hay wagon.

Karin Berquist and Linford Detweiler produce some of the most intelligent music found on either side of the river inspiring the title. This ambitious double album melds Christian and spiritual themes to sepia-toned textures. “Jesus in New Orleans” casts the savior in a dusty-road soundscape of honky-tonk piano and slide guitar: “He’s still my favorite loser/ Falling for the whole entire human race.”

Burns turns up the volume and brandishes a self-styled, solitary quirkiness on this poised debut. He explores alienation (the soaring, roaring “Mighty Little Man”), wonder and introspection from an airplane seat (“Troposphere”) and forlorn longing (the tender “A Reason,” in which hand drums, acoustic guitar and a lone organ note provide the musical backdrop).

If Brian Wilson, Crosby Stills and Nash and R.E.M. met for a musical retreat suffused in prayer, the result might be this album. It’s the product of a Topeka-based quartet that claims Kerry Livgren of the band Kansas among its boosters. Themes of God, family and love are explicit, and the sublime artistry of “Before”—rendered with muted, dreamy textures—makes it more a breath of fresh air than a case of by-the-numbers sermonizing.

The title is a misnomer. Most of the songs predate Mel Gibson's film. But there's no denying the powerful lineup assembled by Gibson, who co-produced this collection, which includes Leon Russell ("Stranger in a Strange Land"), Bob Dylan ("Not Dark Yet"), Elvis Presley ("Where No One Stands Alone") and the Cranberries' Dolores O'Riordan—whose new version of "Ave Maria" features just organ and her distinctive quasi-yodel.

The Georgia-based Paste collective has made a name for itself beneath the mass market radar. The Brindley Brothers show outstanding versatility worthy of the Paste imprint, as reflected in the album's opening one-two punch: a guitar pop tune that segues neatly into the bouncy piano-and-horn gem "Roman Candle" (think "Penny Lane 2004").

In a whispery voice Groves sings of faith and does not shirk from life. "Roll to the Middle" captures a domestic disturbance with aftershock clarity: "We just had World War III here in our kitchen/. . . We shot at each other until we lost ammunition." And when Groves delivers the refrain from "This Little Light of Mine" in the tag of "Jeremiah," it is with an unexpected world-weariness—a perfect encapsulation of Christian paradox.

McKenna fits in with a group of artists—Buddy Miller and Emmylou Harris among them—who transcend commercial country by embracing more soulful instrumental and lyrical textures. McKenna wrestles like a backwater Jacob on "Bible Song" (with Miller paying a guest visit); the Dobro-tinged "If You Ask" sounds like the serenade of a lover/savior reaching out one more time to a fallen, broken object of desire: "If you ask for my forgiveness/ If you call my name, I will come."

Paulinho Garcia ranks as Chicago's best Brazilian guitarist, playing with the deft dexterity of a string ensemble. Accompanied here by saxophonist Greg Fishman (whose playing suggests a strong Stan Getz influence), Garcia shows equal versatility as a vocalist, applying supple scat skills to jazz standards such as "A Night in Tunisia." With acoustic textures that balance the strong and sensitive, "Take Five" is the listening equivalent of fine, fresh-roasted coffee with an assertive splash of toasted almond.