

On music

By [Louis R. Carlozo](#) in the [May 20, 2008](#) issue

In Review



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Time Life



Time Stand Still

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New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward, largely inhabited by poor African-American residents, looks not much different now from when the floodwaters receded. You have to wonder how Washington would have reacted if Katrina had hit a wealthy, white gated community.

If FEMA and the feds have been lackadaisical, the artists who love New Orleans and call it home have not. From Spike Lee's documentary *When the Levees Broke* to the masterful Elvis Costello–Allen Toussaint collaboration *The River in Reverse*, art inspired by Katrina has turned bitter floodwaters into wine. Now come the Blind Boys of Alabama with *Down in New Orleans* (Time Life), backed by the likes of Toussaint and the Hot 8 Brass Band. Says vocalist and founding member Jimmy Carter: “We

decided to . . . support New Orleans while they rebuild after the hurricane. I can't get up on a ladder and hammer nails, but me and the guys can sing inspirational songs that will lift people's hearts while they hammer nails."

Musically speaking, the Blind Boys do nail it. Mix those New Orleans boogie-woogie keyboards and strut-worthy backbeats with the Blind Boys' patent gospel harmonies and you get a novel gumbo. Mahalia Jackson's "How I Got Over"—with its delightful call-and-response—merges the choir loft and the nightclub stage. The elements get more sparse and striking on "You Got to Move," which finds its delicious groove in a foundation of banjo chords, tuba and tambourine—a string-band blend that harkens to New Orleans' earliest jazz innovations.

The elevated mood may shift in musical dynamic from start to finish, but spiritually it never deviates from celebration and elevation. The Blind Boys have done far more than release 12 spiritual favorites. They have testified to the resilience of a people who have endured much and continue to endure. Down, way down in New Orleans, the Blind Boys pay fitting tribute to spirits and voices that rise above.

Other notable CDs:

In the 1980s, the Hooters were the pride of Philly, topping the *Rolling Stone* readers' poll of best new artists. Bandleaders Eric Bazilian and Rob Hyman also fueled the careers of Cyndi Lauper and Joan Osborne. (Bazilian wrote the God meditation "One of Us" for Osborne.) They've picked up where they left off a decade ago, making Don Henley's "The Boys of Summer" their own. They're still exploring deep themes too: "Though I walk in the valley of the shadow / You are the light in my life / And the song in my soul / And the beat of my heart / And the rock in my roll."

Hailing from Burnham-on-Crouch in rural Essex, England, Kate Walsh may not own an iPod, but the Internet has taken her from unknown strummer to adored folk newbie. This album, named for the friend's home where she recorded it, shimmers with acoustic intimacy that might make you feel that Walsh is an old friend confiding secrets—some forlorn, some yearning. "Your Song" is a lovely, longing ballad; the breezy, waltz-time "French Song" is the next best thing to sitting in a café by the Seine.

Chicago's Torrey Lyn Hamilton and Owen Cooper—part of the dynamic arts community at LaSalle Street Church—have rolled out a debut that kicks dust all over pop-country clichés and exudes charm, melody and 1970s-style country joy.

Hamilton's voice proves a buttery blend of sweetness and sass. Her and Cooper's songs have indelible melodies and a storytelling structure. "Linda Lou" weaves the tale of a woman who gives all—perhaps too much—for those around her; in "The Bruno Song" Hamilton extols the virtues of her canine over those of her cheatin' man.

A Grand Ole Opry staple and keeper of the bluegrass flame, Skaggs digs deep—as in 50-plus years—to unearth a dozen bluegrass gems that still sparkle. Bill Monroe, Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs drove a powerhouse group that revamped the genre, and they're represented here on romping remakes of "It's Mighty Dark to Travel" and "Goin' Back to Old Kentucky" (featuring a guest appearance by Scruggs). Skaggs practices bluegrass with Van Gogh mastery; the strength and sensitivity in his voice and mandolin playing evidence his deep Christian faith, especially when things slow to sublime sweetness on "Remember the Cross."

There's something bombastic about Kravitz's music—retro in a way that seems almost forced—though there's little doubt about his spiritual earnestness. His hits "Fly" and "Believe" have overt Christian themes, and on *Love Revolution* Kravitz maintains his mix of higher love and 1970s rock. "Bring It On" (sounding like it remakes Kravitz's remake of "American Woman") declares this manifesto overtop a slurry of fuzz guitars: "I'm gonna walk by faith / Gonna raise my sword / I'm gonna fight my battle / Gonna praise my Lord."