

On music

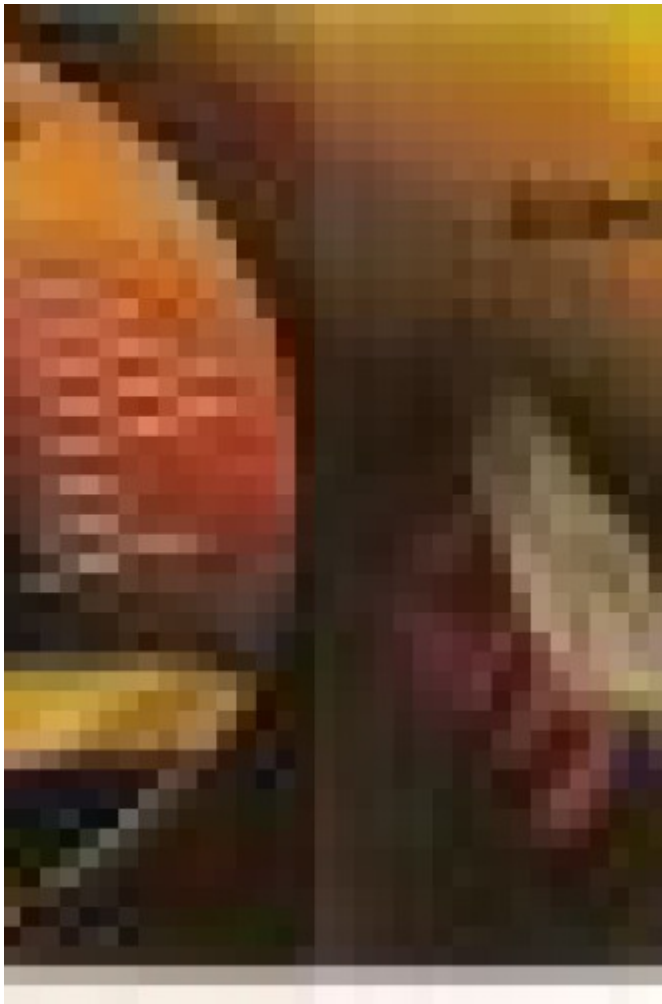
By [Louis R. Carlozo](#) in the [October 7, 2008](#) issue

In Review



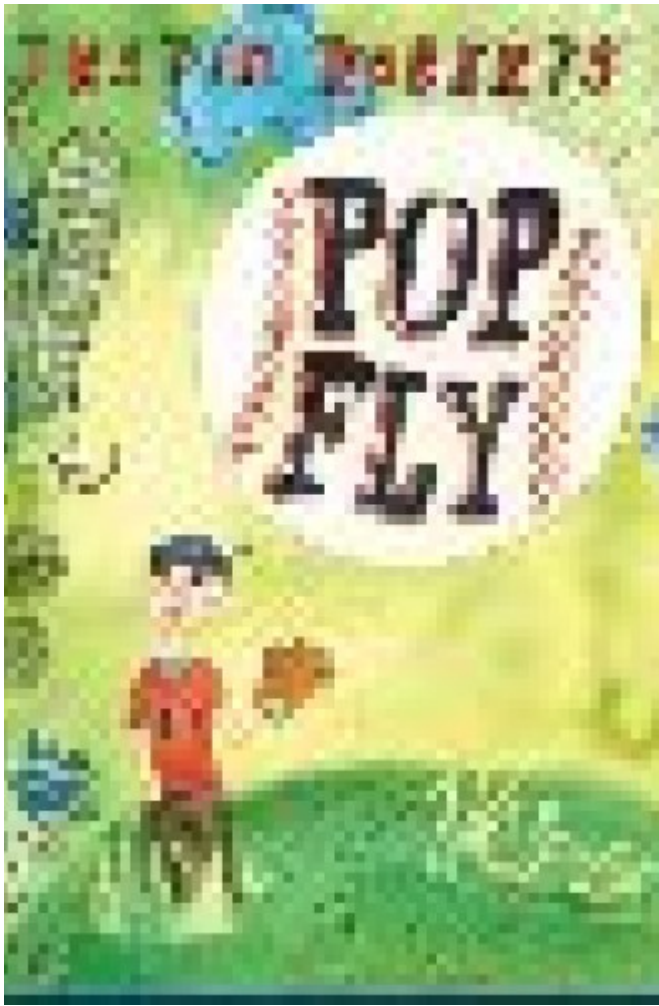
No Other Name

Dany Liston
Above Entertainment



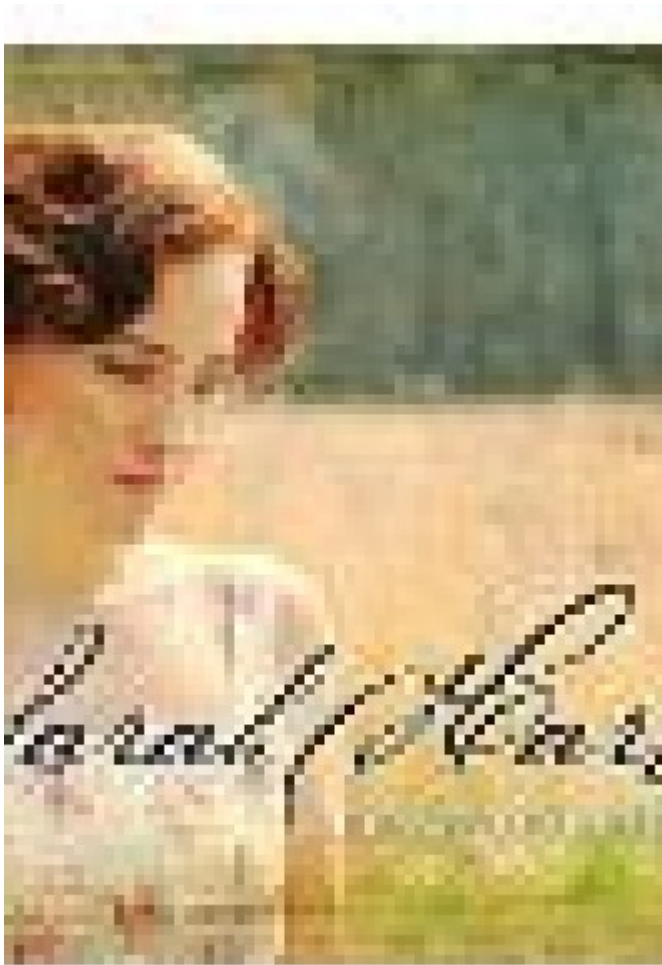
Songs for the Journey

Mark Cleveland Band
self-released



Pop Fly

Justin Roberts
Carpet Square



Road to Ohio

Sarah Hart

Centricity



Nudge It Up a Notch

Steve Cropper and Felix Cavaliere
Stax

The late Curtis Mayfield integrated music and message in a way that changed history. Four-plus decades after achieving renown, his talent shines in the film *Movin' On Up: The Music and Message of Curtis Mayfield and the Impressions* (Reelin' in the Years Productions). More than a documentary, *Movin' On Up* presents 22 complete songs, along with interviews.

A native of Chicago, Mayfield proved a hot commodity at a young age, penning such hits as "The Monkey Time" for Major Lance and "Gypsy Woman" for Brian Hyland. That gave him room to stretch his wings, releasing "Keep On Pushing" in 1964 as part of the vocal trio the Impressions. That song is widely regarded as the first to rally the civil rights movement.

The following year he penned “People Get Ready,” a gospel-tinged ballad that stresses heavenly equality beyond worldly divisions. Martin Luther King Jr. adopted it in 1966 for his Chicago campaign.

But not everyone got it—or if they did, they tried to neuter it. An awkward the clip from Dick Clark Show depicts Mayfield singing “People Get Ready” standing behind the wheel of a small pleasure boat, flanked by bandmates Fred Cash and Sam Gooden. Behind them, a white couple grins as if posing for a tourist photo.

The documentary, which includes interviews with Mayfield before the 1990 accident that left him paralyzed—he was hit by stage lighting at an outdoor concert—follows his trajectory from civil rights icon to funk music visionary. Mayfield left the Impressions in 1970 and two years later released the soundtrack for *Superfly*, which anchored a blaxploitation film about drug dealing and street crime. Many got the wrong message from songs such as “Pusherman” and “Freddie’s Dead.” As Mayfield’s widow puts it, “He did a good way of expressing that if you live by the gun, you die by the gun.”

Parts of *Movin’ On Up* can lead listeners to tears, not just for the beauty of the songs, but for the spirit of racial reconciliation behind them. Andrew Young says of Mayfield: “He was at peace with himself. He was at peace with the world. He was in the tradition of Jesus. He could sing to his enemies.”

Other CDs of note:

A former member of Mama’s Pride—a 1970s southern rock group once perched on the edge of superstardom—Danny Liston returns with a solo effort so plainspoken that its faith message alternates between awkward and disarming. “Amazing Grace” (here sung to the tune of “House of the Rising Sun”) deserves points for effort but lacks spark. “Isaiah 61” infectiously melds southern-fried boogie with simple, scripture-derived lyrics. More simplistic is the opening track “Everything I Need,” which suggests this album falls square into praise and worship territory.

With a husky baritone recalling John Hiatt and percussionless acoustic textures reminiscent of the Indigo Girls, Cleveland draws on Cherokee roots to produce rich, often profound meditations. “Get Up and Walk” sounds like testimony derived from a night sweat: “And 14,000 dancers / with turtle shells and bones / and feathers from an eagle / my brothers turned to stone, they got up and walked.” “Wounded Knee” resorts to some sonic cliché (a plaintive flute arrives almost on cue), but its use of a

cello in a reverb swell evokes real heartache. Available at markclevelandmusic.com.

The savviest songwriter in children's music, Justin Roberts once toiled as a religious studies graduate student at the University of Chicago. He brings those smarts to kid pop that adults can enjoy. The horn-studded title track captures the fear any Little Leaguer might feel standing beneath a fly ball. Roberts gets the worlds that youngsters inhabit. Whether recounting the "Big Field Trip" or sympathizing with the "Stay-at-Home Dad," he brandishes an appealing, bouncy approach and a pure-pop voice à la Squeeze's Glenn Tilbrook.

Utilizing talent from the Jars of Clay camp, Sarah Hart shows a wondrous knack for blending country, folk and melodic pop flavors on a disc that will delight fans of Shawn Colvin or Alison Krauss. A thoughtful Christian songwriter, Hart can sound tough, as on the mandolin-fueled hootenanny "Jenny": "Take your big black eye and your girly tears / Cause Jenny I told you that you're never gonna take my boy from me." The luxurious title track finds "the moon dropping diamonds into the new snow," an apt metaphor for an album brimming with spirit-infused treasure.

It's a classic rock dream team: blues-rock guitarist Cropper teamed with Rascals vocalist-organist Cavaliere. Cavaliere's rich voice (remember "Good Lovin'") sounds timeless on the soul shuffle "If It Wasn't For Loving You." This mostly mid-tempo disc at times labors under its slick production, but it is evident that these two talents still have the goods. The album enters some delightfully unexpected territory, as on the defiant B-minor blues anthem "To Make It Right" (which cops its opening drum fill from "Ain't Too Proud to Beg").