

Beyond versatile

by [Louis R. Carlozo](#) in the [May 3, 2011](#) issue

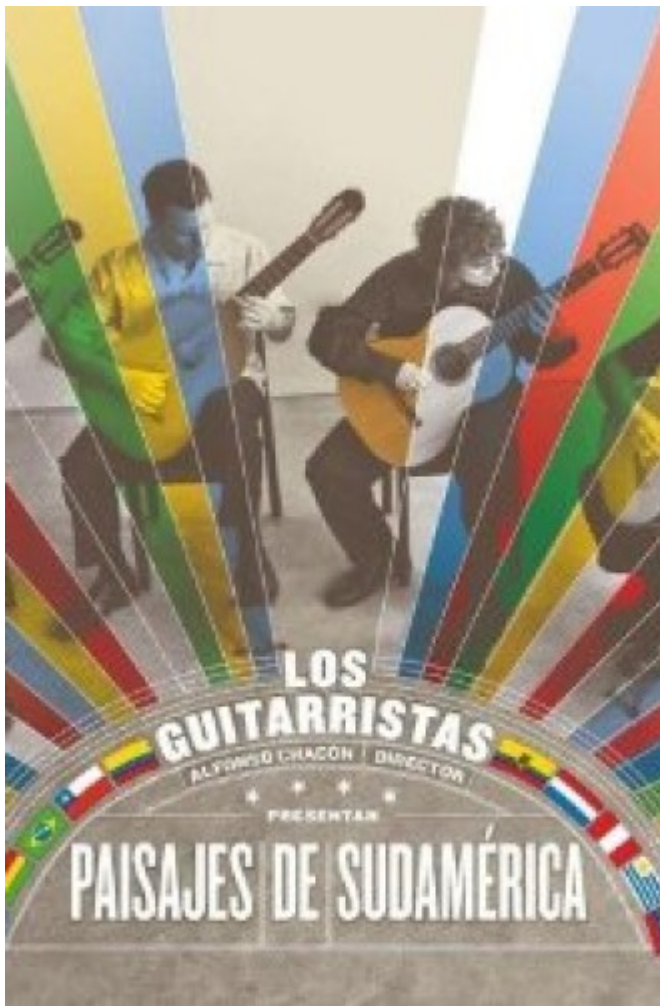


In Review



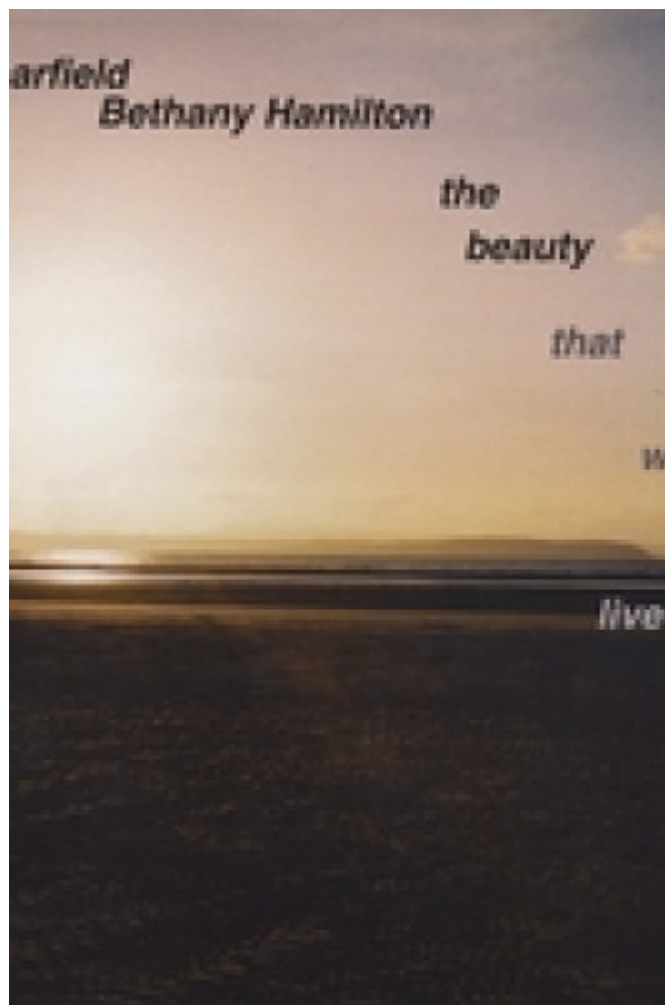
This Is Not the Ending

Information Superhighway
self-released



Paisajes de Súdamerica

by Los Guitarristas
self-released



The Beauty That We Live In

by Rob Clearfield and Bethany Hamilton
self-released



A Thousand Words

By Rob Clearfield
self-released

Every so often there's a new talent who sounds like bottled lightning. Chicagoan Rob Clearfield, not yet 30, is blessed as well with a relentless work ethic. Currently playing in at least half a dozen musical projects, Clearfield also provides music at two Chicago churches. On the piano, he is equally comfortable pounding out old-school gospel and improvising a suite; he'll also pick up an electric guitar and produce sonic washes à la U2 or Pink Floyd.

It's challenging to spotlight a talent this productive and varied—by my count, Clearfield has appeared prominently on at least four recordings in the last 18 months. On *Paisajes de Sudamérica* (self-released), acoustic-guitar quartet Los Guitarristas—led by Alfonso Chacon—takes listeners on a ten-song tour of South

America. It's difficult to imagine a more evocative departure for warmer climes. The five-song suite *The Beauty That We Live In* (self-released) features Clearfield playing keys, guitar, mandolin and accordion on songs for worship. Stripped of percussive anchor, the compositions float from nimbuslike heights, aided by the clarion voice of Bethany Hamilton. On *A Thousand Words* (self-released), Clearfield plays eight improvised instrumentals on a Fazioli 212, the Rolls Royce of pianos. From the discordant "Arctic Circle" to the melancholy "Song," the results are consistently captivating.

Clearfield's latest release, by his jazz-inflected group Information Superhighway, finds him especially mature and confident. He's the lead composer on *This Is Not the Ending*, melding jazz, progressive rock and ambient music. Vocalist Leslie Beukelman sounds spectral one minute (as on the title track's opening phrase) and morning-dew sweet the next (on the astral-folk "Soft and Not Knowing"). The disc signs off with "Your Voice," taking a hairpin stylistic turn toward the more rustic side of Neil Young before melting into a serpentine jazz bridge. It's a risk more experienced artists would avoid, but Clearfield's group pulls it off.

Clearfield puts himself out on a limb at a time when too many others trying to make a living in music play it safe. The level of polish on these four discs is as varied as the genres, but all four showcase Clearfield's formidable musicianship and vision.