

On Music

By [Louis R. Carlozo](#) in the [February 23, 2010](#) issue

In Review



Under the Covers, Vol. 2

Matthew Sweet and Susanna Hoffs
Shout! Factory



Welcome to the Masquerade

Thousand Foot Krutch

Tooth & Nail



Music of Grace: Amazing Grace

various artists

Valley



My Very Life

Paulinho Garcia
Chicago Sessions



Lutheran Songs Today: Songs for Worship, Volume 1

various artists

Lutheran Songs Today



It Is Well

Kutless
BEC

Thousand Foot Krutch shows admirable ambition on *Welcome to the Masquerade*, deftly juggling metal, pop, rap and post-grunge. The trio mostly succeeds in making it all appealing, and the album's sound is ultimately more inventive than derivative—this is not just another mainstream-aping Christian rock band.

The clean cohesion and pop sensibility owe much to producer Aaron Sprinkle (of Poor Old Lu fame), who impressively keeps all the sonic plates spinning. "Fire It Up" fades in as if from a nimbus cloud, then grabs the listener with jagged guitar riffs and a half-spoken, half-shouted refrain. (Listen for the guitar solo by Pete Stewart of Gramma train.)

Elsewhere *Masquerade* walks on the mild side and stumbles. “Watching Over Me” lurches dangerously close to the should-be-banned category of metal power ballad, with its treacle string section and Brylcreem-smooth angel imagery. Given how original much of the album sounds, this song sticks out like a Spandex-covered thumb. More appealing in the softer spectrum is the album closer, “Already Home,” which plants a massive, anthemlike hook atop piano and acoustic guitar, though the strings again sound candied and grandiose.

Lyricaly the band serves up easy-to-swallow declarations of faith, which could use more punch in terms of imagery and wordplay. Yet the ballad “Look Away” moves with its storyline—references are to cutting or attempted suicide—toward a redemptive power that lies beyond the pain: “Take all these cuts, and make them shine/ Don’t want to be perfect, just alright.”

When *Masquerade* rocks, as much of it does, it sounds like a rowdy house party with a small army of righteous harmony singers in full mosh-pit mode. Witness “Smackdown,” with its beat breakdowns tipping the hat to either Billy Squier’s “The Stroke” or Run-D.M.C.’s “King of Rock.”

We’ve heard all the elements before, but not quite in this combination. *Masquerade* wins the listener over on multiple levels: you can stage-dive to it, rap to it, hum it in the shower and most certainly be uplifted by it.

Following their collection of 1960s covers, power-popsters Matthew Sweet and Susanna Hoffs (of the Bangles) assay ’70s hits by Bread, George Harrison and Todd Rundgren. The duo sticks to the scripts, emulating the originals’ feel (and keys) with pleasing results. On Fleetwood Mac’s “Second Hand News,” Sweet and Hoffs re-create Stevie Nicks and Lindsey Buckingham’s vocal vibe. (Buckingham guests on guitar.) Their take on John Lennon’s “Gimme Some Truth” boasts just enough bite, though Big Star’s “Back of a Car” could use more edge to counter its jangle.

If “Amazing Grace” is your favorite hymn, you’re in luck: this disc delivers 14 renditions of the John Newton classic. Katie McMahon’s plaintive vocal version features bagpipes; Lisbeth Scott’s pop rendition percolates with drum loops and sweeping strings; Walela gilds the tune in tribal hand percussion and a synthesizer drone. While it’s hard to imagine listening to the same hymn 14 times in succession, this fascinating musical exercise would make a fitting soundtrack for spiritual meditation. Perhaps most poignant: William Neil’s instrumental, played on a faraway

church organ.

Paulinho Garcia is one of the best Brazilian fingerstyle guitarists and singers in the United States. On *My Very Life* he leads a ten-piece band in a grand tour of Brazilian styles, from bossa nova to marcha rancho. The album also showcases his talents as a songwriter. "Cintura Fina" bounces with joyous Portuguese scatting, while the title track sketches out a ballad of marital bliss that's sunnier than Ipanema in mid-January. The upbeat album closer "Disfrutando a Boa Vida" surprises with martial drumming and lead guitar work reminiscent of Carlos Santana.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has its own music scene, with a wealth of artists in many styles. This 16-track disc features several of the most prominent, including vocalist Peder Eide (with Bob Stromberg on the gentle "Abba, I Belong to You"); Jonathan Rundman (getting grungy on "Hey Hey Samuel"); and Richard Bruxvoort Colligan (poppy and perky on "God's Love Endures Forever"). The first of five discs in a series, this collection is well suited for youth-group gatherings and upbeat retreat worship.

The second praise album by Kutless sounds all too pat. It's cookie-cutter hard rock that's not too hard, produced from a deep-fried, alt-rock recipe. True, vocalist Jon Micah Sumrall has a voice that glides between a baritone growl and a tenacious tenor. But "What Faith Can Do," the album's first single, contains enough lyrical banality to outsurplus the loaves and fishes: "Everybody falls sometimes / Gotta find the strength to rise / From the ashes, and make a new beginning."