

Sight & Sound

MUSIC

The Ministry of Kirk Franklin

The Rebirth of Kirk Franklin

By Kirk Franklin, GospoCentric Records.

Kirk Franklin describes the last three years as the darkest of his life. But out of that wilderness experience he says God birthed an album that signals a turning point in his career. Featuring duets with Shirley Caesar and the late gospel great Willie Neal Johnson among many others, *The Rebirth of Kirk Franklin* is all about ministry, Franklin says, and he hopes it will focus attention on the message of Christ instead of His messenger.

Though still laced with the R&B hooks and hip-hop beats that marked earlier releases, the disc captures the heart of praise and worship. The opening “Hosanna” is a jubilant anthem that captures the passion of young people willing to give God their all. “My Life, My Love, My All” is a stirring prayer of surrender, while the worshipful “Always” speaks of unwavering devotion to Christ.

The release also features a host of guests, including Bishop T.D. Jakes on “9/11,” in which he converses with Franklin about keeping faith in turbulent times. Donnie McClurkin, Crystal Lewis and Jaci Velasquez lend their voices to “The Blood,” a standout cut calling for racial unity in the body of Christ. A reprise of it features Yolanda Adams and Alvin

Slaughter.

Richard Smallwood offers a piano solo on “Don’t Cry,” and dc Talk’s Toby McKeehan helps Franklin break some cultural barriers on a bonus track that sounds similar to .’s work.

The Rebirth of Kirk Franklin proves that Franklin knows how to reach diverse generations with the gospel.

Adrienne S. Gaines

The Way She Is

The Way I Am

By Jennifer Knapp, Gotee Records.

Jennifer Knapp has some big shoes to fill: her own. With a certified gold album and a plethora of other accolades, including a Dove Award for best new artist, Knapp continues to solidify her position in Christian music with her third album, *The Way I Am*, which some consider her best so far.

Knapp’s strength lies in proclaiming the truths of life in a tough, yet fragile package. Knapp’s vocals are strong and gritty, but her lyrics are heartfelt and honest. In songs such as “By and By,” Knapp reveals fragility peppered with optimism.

Combining excellent musicianship, production and lyrics, *The Way I Am* is a winner on many fronts. Though it is not earth-shaking, it is clearly Knapp’s best effort to date. While many artists struggle to maintain their individuality in the music industry, Jennifer Knapp proves she is willing to create music

that reflects her life, just where she is.

Doug Joseph

United in Worship

City on a Hill: Sing Alleluia

By various artists, Essential Records.

In 2000, Essential Records brought its cadre of top artists (and a few guests) together in a spirit of community to record *City on a Hill: Songs of Worship and Praise*. Now the label has reassembled them along with some new voices for a second project: *City on a Hill: Sing Alleluia*.

This second effort is much like the first, filled with mostly quiet, contemplative, worshipful songs from unique artist pairings such as Phil Keaggy and Jennifer Knapp on "Hallowed," and Bebo Norman with Cliff and Danielle Young of Caedmon's Call on "Holy Is Your Name." The stirring "Sing Alleluia" features Knapp with Third Day's lead singer Mac Powell, who later teams up with Fernando Ortega on the awe-inspiring "Our Great God."

The success of , which contained the No. 1 hit "God of Wonders," seemed to lie largely in the fact that the focus was on the Lord, not the artists, in majestic songs that still retained a modern flavor. continues that tradition.

Natalie Nichols Gillespie

BOOKS

Lessons From the Unchurched

Surprising Insights From the Unchurched

*By Thom S. Rainer, Zondervan,
304 pages, hardcover, \$*

Maybe the unchurched aren't so hard to reach after all. In his book *Surprising Insights From the Unchurched*, seminary dean, pastor and church consultant Thom S. Rainer reports that most unchurched people have a fair degree of church experience and biblical knowledge, and they can handle complex biblical truths. Rainer's composition of research was culled from examining hundreds of young Christians and more than 100 healthy congregations.

Among the findings were that the pastor's preaching and the church's doctrine were key factors inspiring nonbelievers to plant themselves in a particular church. The friendliness of members came in an important but distant third, and the church's facilities, particularly the nursery, were also a key concern.

The author asserts that his research of young Christians affirmed that integrity to the biblical text is crucial and that despite our pluralistic society, people are looking for something concrete to believe in. Despite the Christian stereotypes in the mainstream culture, *Surprising Insights* proves that God's Word and the lifestyle of Christ are timelessly relevant.

John M. DeMarco

The Faith of U2

Walk On: The Spiritual Journey of U2

*By Steve Stockman, Relevant Books,
206 pages, paperback, \$*

Though they eschew the “Christian” label, rock band U2 may have something to teach the conventional church. *Walk On: The Spiritual Journey of U2* offers a stirring examination of what has provided the strength for one of rock music’s most enduring bands of the last 20 years—namely, radical discipleship nurtured by close Christian friends that expresses itself in acts of service while eschewing the conformities demanded by organized religion.

Steve Stockman, a Presbyterian minister from Ireland, studies the music and lyrics from each of U2’s 12 full-length albums and culls excerpts from various interviews given by the band or its associates. He focuses in particular on the vibrant faith and spiritual wrestling personified in U2 front man Bono.

The author pulls no punches in castigating the Christian subculture for insisting that the band be “Christian” on its terms rather than according to what Stockman sees as a purer biblical lifestyle. The writer may be a bit too heavy in his categorical dismissal of the evangelical world, but the book is effective in stating its case that artists with a spiritual message shouldn’t be dismissed because they occasionally question their faith, drink, smoke and even curse.

The world needs Bono as a model, Stockman asserts, because he portrays an “obsession with Jesus Christ” that does not allow him to become complacent but compels him to tirelessly help marginalized people find peace and justice.

John M. DeMarco

A 'Bad' Christian?

When Bad Christians Happen to Good People

By Dave Burchett, Waterbrook Press,

243 pages, paperback, \$.

Is there such a thing as a “bad” Christian? Author Dave Burchett says yes in his book, *When Bad Christians Happen to Good People*.

An Emmy award-winning TV sports director and former staff member of Campus Crusade for Christ's Athletes in Action, Burchett writes with humility and honesty about his own life. He expresses the deep hurt he felt when his infant daughter was shunned from her church nursery because of a birth abnormality and comments on the causes of the many church splits he has observed.

His conclusion? Not all Christians are “good.” And not all the “Christian” things we do are biblical. Burchett encourages readers to evaluate their lives in light of eternal vs. non-eternal issues, external vs. internal approaches to behavior change, and separation vs. involvement in the culture.

After reading Burchett's work, two foundational questions are left standing: Who is Jesus Christ, and what difference does knowing Him make to my life? Burchett hopes Christians will think twice before giving a pat answer.

Constance Fink

Rearing King's Kids

Opening Your Child's Spiritual Windows

*By Cheri Fuller, Zondervan,
176 pages, paperback, \$*

Consumer research indicates that parents are avidly interested in how to train their children about spiritual issues. Educator and practiced author Cheri Fuller provides plenty of insights, ideas and encouragement in this very readable book. She breaks the topic into four "windows": Enjoying God, Loving God, Following God and Serving God, with three chapters under each of these main themes.

Fuller defines spiritual windows as opportunities for the heart to grasp the true nature of God and what it means to live the Christian life. Her discussions about how children think and how parents can make spiritual concepts real to them mainly address children up to adolescent age. Prolific anecdotes, interactive suggestions, and helpful dos and don'ts are realistic yet effective.

Parents and kids who like to be hands-on in exploring new ideas have lots of opportunities: Fuller provides journaling ideas, prompts for sharing parent-to-child, and other lists of resources for both kids and adults. Parents of children steeped in church life as well as those with only a smattering of biblical background and experience can gain lots of help. Parents not too sure of their own footing as followers of Christ can even practice many of these methods for opening their own spiritual windows. After all, Jesus Himself invited us to become like children in our own spiritual journeys.

Karen Schmidt

Timeless Truths

The Inner Strength Series

*By John Bevere, Charisma House,
96 pages each, paperback, \$ each*

Author John Bevere is known for a delivery that is part drill sergeant, part commander. He won acclaim in the early 1990s for his books on the fear of the Lord, breaking intimidation and avoiding offense. Today Christians can revisit those truths through Bevere's compact, five-volume Inner Strength Series: *Recognizing Your Spiritual Authority*, *Break the Power of Negative Words*, *Forgive and Build Bridges*, *Walk in God's Pattern for Success* and *Embrace the Fear of God*.

In discussing spiritual authority, Bevere points to intimidation as a prime way to lose out. "As with most of Satan's devices, intimidation is camouflaged and subtle. We feel its effects—depression, confusion, lack of faith—without knowing its root," he writes.

Offense is another tool of the enemy that can cripple Christians' progress in life. "Often those who are offended do not even realize they are trapped. They are oblivious to their condition because they are so focused on the wrong that was done to them. The most effective way for the enemy to blind us is to cause us to focus on ourselves." Bevere suggests taking a second look at why you're making a change. Are you just offended?

Bevere also exposes the traps of seeking revenge, explains divine order and discusses the difference between the fear of man and the fear of God. "Many believers often feel weak, helpless and inadequate to live strong, powerful spiritual lives, yielding to the temptations of the enemy, succumbing to

the carnal passions of their human natures and failing to rise up in victory,” he writes. Bevere’s five booklets offer biblical remedies—ways to help believers grab hold of their inner strength.

Marsha Gallard

MUSIC SPOTLIGHT

Pushing, Pressing and Pursuing God

Judy Jacobs is known for her passionate, energetic delivery. Moving to the beat, she pushes, pulls, yells, leaps and occasionally breaks into a dance while belting out a song. But it’s not her vocal ability or even her stage presence that draws the crowds, Jacobs says.

“Every ounce of energy inside, I want to give it to Him. I want to please Him,” says Jacobs, a Lumbee Indian from North Carolina who has been singing since age 5. “I don’t think my gift is to wow people with my voice, but I think the anointing is what draws people in. Everything we do [is] unto the Lord.”

Having sung at Benny Hinn crusades, numerous women’s conferences and on Trinity Broadcasting Network’s Praise the Lord show, the Cleveland, Tenn., resident sees people longing for an intense encounter with God. She hopes her music helps inspire them to passionately seek Him.

“People just want God right now. They’re desperate, and they’re hurting. People have come to realize they need something bigger in their lives.”

Several hundred people join her at her Web site each month for a prayer vigil called The Watch, and she plans to host a mentoring conference for women in the fall, which will eventually lead to an institute of mentoring. Her art imitates her life, as she exhibits a passion for God that is visible on and off stage. "God has told us to push, press and pursue," Jacobs says. "We're aggressively pursuing all God has for us."

Adrienne S. Gaines