

Sight & Sound

BOOKS

Fatal Distractions

By Joyce Rodgers, Charisma House,

224 pages, paperback, \$.

Church of God in Christ evangelist Joyce Rodgers is a minister who seeks to prevent Satan from using one of his most lethal weapons, distractions, to poison our hearts. In *Fatal Distractions* she discusses the attitudes that distract us and bring about spiritual death, specifically “the death of our God-ordained purpose in this life.”

Rodgers’ seven deadly sins are envy, loneliness, anger, bitterness, hurt, despair and rejection. They build until we cap them with the most insidious distraction of all: ourselves.

Fortunately, she reveals how to stop Satan dead in his tracks: by practically applying the Bible and prayer to our lives. She emphasizes, much like Bible teacher Joyce Meyer, whom she quotes, how we can block internal distractions with godly attractions—such as replacing fear with unrestrained praise.

Having a heart for women, Rodgers addresses her primary audience like an older sister. She tempers a deadly serious message with humor and compassion.

Sometimes the author goes for the jugular. For example, she writes, "Women in particular are susceptible to the subtle yet insidious distractions that 'dress themselves up' to be something beautiful, yet inside are rotten to the core." Some women might not appreciate the stereotyping here, since men are certainly vulnerable to the same temptations.

Nonetheless, Rodgers' powerful statements cut through to our hearts. She directs our passion toward God and away from fatal distractions. Rodgers' audience appeal, which is evident by her many appearances on TBN, Daystar and radio, is strong. Her message brings life to defeat the power of Satan's deadly arsenal.

Pamela Robinson

Optimize Your Marriage: Making an Eternal Impact on Family and Friends

By Phil and Susy Downer with Ken Walker,
Christian Publications, softcover,
264 pages, \$.

Although this is a book about marriage, its primary focus is on Christian discipleship and training and how they affect not only the family but also all of life. This is not surprising, seeing that authors Phil and Susy Downer are the founders of Discipleship Network of America (DNA) and conduct conferences on aspects of Christian living.

Clearly, Optimizing Your Marriage was born out of the authors' personal experience and ministry.

On the brink of divorce, this couple discovered that God's

grace could mend their broken relationship. Now they share the worst and the best of times, including the practical tactics they have learned to circumvent their personal weaknesses and turn them to strengths.

There is a strong call to mentorship here—to pass along this wealth of experience and understanding to others. The content is solid, basic principles that may be review for some readers and fresh insight for those new to the faith.

Deborah Delk

MUSIC

Illuminate

By David Crowder Band, Sixstepsrecords.

Worship leader David Crowder follows up his impressive 2002 debut with another groundbreaking modern-worship album. Produced by Charlie Peacock, *Illuminate* explores the theme of light, capturing God's creativity on "Stars," and emphasizing our earnest desire to be light and be filled with the light of truth on standouts such as the alternative arrangement of the hymn "Heaven Came Down" and "How Great."

It's difficult to find a weak spot on this well-crafted modern-worship feast. From the acoustic opening interlude "Sparks Fly" to the 1960s-turned-1980s electronic-flavored fun of "Revolutionary Love" and the catchy rocker "No One Like You," *Illuminate* lights up the crowded modern-worship category.

As an added bonus, Crowder partnered with the makers of Propellerhead software to allow him to put a copy of the music

program on the disc. Listeners can see and mix the tracks to their own taste, proving that Crowder remains a step ahead of the rest.

Natalie Nichols Gillespie

The Heavens Are Telling

By Karen Clark Sheard, Elektra Records.

Karen Clark Sheard, considered one of gospel's premier vocalists, recently released her third solo project, *The Heavens Are Telling*. A member of the trend-setting group The Clark Sisters and daughter of the late gospel icon Mattie Moss Clark, Sheard showcases her strength as a live vocalist with the first half of the CD consisting of tracks recorded at her home church in Detroit.

Strong live cuts include a moving remake of Andraé Crouch's "We Are Not Ashamed" with guest artists Mary Mary and the worshipful tune "God Is Here," penned by Israel Houghton (of Israel & New Breed) and CCM artist Martha Munizzi. Other favorites include the calypso-influenced "Glorious (Make the Praise)" and the gospel rendition of R&B artist Jill Scott's "He Loves Me."

The second half of the CD includes five studio cuts, all produced and written by Sheard's cousin J. Moss and Paul "PDA" Allen. Other urban-flavored tracks include the inspiring "Go Ahead" featuring mainstream artist Missy Elliott and the funky "Praise Up." "I Owe," with special guest Ramiyah, draws the listener in with its infectious melody and gratitude-laden lyrics.

Sheard has sealed her place as one of gospel's finest with this project.

René Williams

Songs 4 Worship: The U.K. Collection

By various artists, Integrity Music.

Songs 4 Worship: The U.K. Collection introduces or reintroduces listeners to modern praise songs made popular or recently emerging from the British Isles and Australia.

Tim Hughes performs his international hit "Here I Am to Worship" and Delirious rouses listeners with "Did You Feel the Mountains Tremble?" Brian

Doerksen adds "Come Now Is the Time to Worship," and Robin Mark leads worshipers with an Irish touch on "Forever." Paul Balcohe closes disc one with the popular song "Open the Eyes of My Heart."

Darlene Zschech is featured on "The Power of Your Love," and Irish worship leader Eoghan Heaslip closes the two-disc collection with "O Come Let Us Adore Him."

Natalie Nichols Gillespie

The Art of Praise

By various artists, Integrity Gospel.

This collection allows a variety of talented worship leaders in gospel-laden churches to show off their best side and work their background choirs into a frenzy of praise.

Desmond Pringle shines on the opener, "You Are Good." Other standouts include the jazz-infused "Above All" by the Take Six-like harmony group J-4 Twenty3, the smooth silky vocals by Daryl Coley on "Desperate Desire" and the give-and-take by Joe Pace & The Colorado Mass Choir (featuring Alicia Williams and Maurice Carter) on "I Will Bless the Lord at All Times."

The Art of Praise easily brings down the walls between "gospel" music and "modern worship," allowing the body of Christ to benefit from both musical styles.

Natalie Nichols Gillespie

Professional Rapper

By John Reuben, Gotee Records.

John Reuben, known for sharp wit and occasional musical quirkiness, gets more serious with his third Gotee Records release, Professional Rapper. Sure, quirky John Reu makes his mark. But a probing Reuben teams with Adrienne Liesching (The Benjamin Gate) for the haunting confessional of "I Haven't Been Myself," which states: "I'm not all right / I haven't been myself lately / I'm not OK with the way I've let my thoughts overtake me."

With that same transparency, Reuben narrates his insecurities on the romantic "5 Years to Write." Reuben deserves credit for stepping outside his comfort zone, providing inspiration and comfort to listeners who identify with struggles like his. His passion and sincerity make Professional Rapper one of his best and a milestone for Christian hip-hop.

DeWayne Hamby

MUSIC SPOTLIGHT

Stacie Orrico Is Staying True

With her song "More to Life" being the No. 3 dance single in the United States and following right on the heels of her wildly popular hit "Stuck," Stacie Orrico is on her way to reaching her goal.

Orrico, 17, sings edgy R&B, has toured with Destiny's Child, appears repeatedly on MTV's TRL, and is popular in Europe, Australia and Japan. Yet this pop star is a Christian who says she wants to "change some people's lives along the way."

"I want to set a new standard in the mainstream market and show up-and-coming artists that you can be a respectable woman, stay true to the things you believe in, and you don't have to take all your clothes off to be successful," she says.

Her music is making a difference. "Stuck" made one young woman reconsider a relationship she was in. Orrico explains: "I said in a show that relationships are supposed to add to your life and bring you joy, and that person should be teaching you things. ... You should be growing together. This girl had never heard anyone say that relationships were actually meant to be beneficial to your life."

Orrico's lyrics are about growing up, guys and family. "I'm writing music that doesn't say Jesus, doesn't quote a Bible verse, but it's about things that every girl—I don't care if you're a Christian or a Buddhist or an atheist—you're going to go through this. But it's music they can groove to as well."

Marsha Gallardo