

REVIEW: Crowder Embraces Holy Spirit Fire on 'I Know a Ghost'

"This is a Holy Ghost party song," David Crowder sings to begin "La Luz." Crowder, a longtime Christian music veteran, has never been more unabashed about his Spirit-filled side and love for the Holy Spirit than on *I Know a Ghost*, his third solo album. The result is an unforgettable experience, fusing charismatic subjects like spiritual warfare, revival fire and even supernatural healing with an eclectic musical mix of gospel, bluegrass and hip-hop beats. After all, it wouldn't be a David Crowder album if it wasn't very strange.

Despite fusing a dizzying array of styles, *I Know a Ghost* holds together as a relatively cohesive album thanks to clever sequencing. An early section of radio hits transitions into a gospel-focused section; then into slower ballads; then into folksy, banjo-driven songs; and finally into a reflective, slower final sequence. Because of this, *I Know a Ghost* avoids the feeling of musical schizophrenia that at times plagued his last album, *American Prodigal*. Sonically, Crowder has mixed up his usual formula by adding gospel and R&B touches—a breath of fresh air, almost uniformly well-implemented—and roughly a metric ton of trap hip-hop beats. Musical highlights include "Let It Rain" (featuring Mandisa), "I'm Leaning on You" (featuring Riley Clemmons) and the bizarre-but-fun single "Wildfire."

Crowder's lyrics, however, are what will (and rightly should) excite most charismatic listeners. Though Crowder has never seemed hostile to Pentecostal matters, he has previously musically gravitated toward the liturgical elements (he even based an entire album on the Catholic funeral Mass). But Crowder's focus here is on the atoning sacrifice of Jesus

Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Those aren't the only two topics, of course. "No Rival" catalogs the attributes of God. On "Let It Rain," Crowder muses on the nature of blessings: "The same God who brought the sunshine is the same one who brings the rain." And "Crushing Snakes" is a warfare battle cry for the saints that morphs into a picture of the Second Coming: "Do you see Him, King of heaven, champion of all creation?/ ... Dressed in light, we see Him coming/ On a horse that's white like lightning."

But without fail, Crowder returns to the sacrificial work of the Son and the ongoing works of the Spirit. The opening title track makes it his thesis: "He went to hell and back to leave us His own/ Now I know a Ghost." Crowder considers the agony Christ went through on "Golgotha Hill," ultimately acknowledging, "There ain't no stopping love." He's confused why God would ever make such a sacrifice on "The Sinner's Cure," brokenly wondering, "Why did God kill His Son?/ Was it something I said, or something I've done?/ Why'd there have to be death when He's supposed to be love?" But despite his questions, the buoyant "Happy Day" finds Crowder exulting in the joy of Easter morning: "Hell thought it won, but hell hoped in vain."

Already a hit radio single, "Red Letters" links Christ's death with Holy Spirit infilling: "Son of God hanging on a hill/ Hell was my destiny/ ... Breath of God filled my lungs/ And the Holy Ghost awakened me." Crowder's Holy Spirit encounters fuel the album's most potent lyrics. During the chorus of "Child of God," Crowder exuberantly shouts, "Good God, I'm on fire/ I may be flesh and bone/ But in my haunted soul/ I got the Holy Ghost." The self-described "Holy Spirit party song" "La Luz" bubbles over into other languages, as bilingual rappers Social Club Misfits share how the Holy Spirit has transformed them. Crowder ties both thematic threads together in the closing track, "Ghost," where he sings: "Get ready, there's an empty tomb/ Get ready, there's a Ghost in the room/ Get ready, even

mountains move/ Get ready, all the stories are true: He'll heal you."

It's been years since this reviewer has heard an album so lyrically fixated on the transforming presence of the Holy Spirit as *I Know a Ghost*. From the opening lyrics to the closing notes, Crowder proudly declares he is Spirit-filled. Charismatic Christians who can handle diverse, not-easily-categorized music need to hear this. {eo}

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