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Aaron Jeffrey (also Aaron Benward and Jeffrey Benward)

Aaron Benward, voc.; Jeffrey Benward, voc. By Aaron Jeffrey: 1994—*Aaron Jeffrey* (StarSong); 1996—*After the Rain*; 1997—*The Climb*. By Aaron Benward: 2000—*Imagine* (Sparrow). By Jeffrey Benward: 1985—*Jeoff Benward* (Communication); 1988—*The Redeemer* (ForeFront); 1990—*Set It into Motion*; 2000—*Jeffrey Benward* (Ministry).

A father and son duo formed in 1992, Aaron Jeffrey craft albums of pleasing pop music replete with traditional evangelical themes. Jeffrey is a classically trained musician who has worked in Christian music since the '70s. He harmonizes with his adult son Aaron to create a sound that reminds some critics of the Proclaimers or the Rembrandts (or, in Christian music circles, of **Phillips, Craig, and Dean**, for whom the elder Benward has written songs). Their song "He Is" has the almost unique distinction of mentioning by name every one of the sixty-six books of the Bible (cf. "The Statement" by **Transformation Crusade**). The hit "I Go to the Rock" was written by **Dottie Rambo**. Aside from their commitment to specifically Christian evangelism, Aaron Jeffrey view their ministry goal as being to "show a positive parent/child relationship." The band has participated in events sponsored by Focus on the Family and Promise Keepers. Of their three albums, *The Climb* has a somewhat rougher, more spontaneous feel to it and has generally been the best received by critics.

In 2000, both father and son released solo albums. Aaron's *Imagine* showcases the younger Benward's songwriting skills with soft rock tunes focusing on the general theme of recogniz-

ing what is possible through Christ (Philippians 4:13). He was perhaps affected by an event in 1999 in which he, his wife, and their children were unharmed by an accident that caused their truck to flip over four times. Jeffrey's solo projects fit solidly into the adult contemporary genre, setting tried-and-true notions to familiar light pop sounds. Devotion to God, family, and country are all extolled in a confident baritone that is itself an inspiration. Both Benwards reside in Franklin, Tennessee.

Christian radio hits: By Aaron Jeffrey: "One Million Reasons" (# 25 in 1994); "I Go to the Rock" (# 19 in 1995); "We All Need" (# 2 in 1996). By Aaron Benward: "Captured" (# 16 in 2000).

Jimmy Abegg (a.k.a. Jimmy A)

1991—*Entertaining Angels* (Sparrow); 1994—*Secrets*.

www.jimmyabegg.com

A musician's musician, Jimmy Abegg (b. 1954) from Alliance, Nebraska, was a member of the seminal Christian rock band **Vector**, and he continues to show up on albums by a variety of artists who persuade him to add his trademark swirling guitars to their projects. He has been a member of both **Rich Mullins' Ragamuffin Band** and **Charlie Peacock's** Acoustic Trio. The solo albums listed above were actually released under the trade name "Jimmy A." Both are stellar presentations of jazz-tinged soft rock, reminiscent at times of Lindsey Buckingham. *CCM* called *Entertaining Angels* "one of the most musically exciting and creative albums of 1991," while also noting, "nothing here even remotely resembles the bulk of (Abegg's)

work with Vector and Peacock.” The song “Thin But Strong Cord” features both Peacock and **Vince Ebo** on shared vocals. *Secrets*, however, is the more focused and accessible of the two solo projects. Lyrically, Abegg’s songs offer not direct statements of faith so much as reflections on life as viewed through Christian eyes. They often come across as simple exhibitions of a man who is in love (with his family, his world, his God, and life in general). Yet he is aware of paradox: “In a perfect world, time would surely linger / like the dawning of the day / and love would last forever”; so begins a song that has as its chorus, “This ain’t no perfect world.” On another tune, Abegg sings that “love is longing.” But at the end of the day, he claims, “I am a simple man / I love my wife, my best friend / Don’t need a lot to live / Don’t want more than I can give / I believe in what Jesus said / how he dies . . . how he lives.” As a composer, Abegg has written or cowritten hit songs for **Susan Ashton** (“Remember Not”) and **Ji Lim** (“Full of Wonder”).

For trivia buffs: Abegg is also a gifted photographer and painter. His pictures have been featured as cover art on albums by such artists as **Phil Keaggy**, **Michael W. Smith**, and **Chris Taylor**. He collaborated with **Kevin Max** to produce *At the Foot of Heaven* (StarSong, 1995), a visual collection of illustrated poems. He has also compiled a book of prayers called *Ragamuffin Prayers* (Harvest House, 2000).

Christian radio hits: “Thin But Strong Cord” (# 2 in 1991).

Able Cain

Greg Asher, voc.; Leo Gunther, drums; Matt McCabe, gtr.; Eric Schrepel, kybrd. 1994—*Able Cain* [EP] (Marathon).

www.finleysound.com/ablecain

Noted for a progressive ’80s sound similar to The Fixx or **Simple Minds**, Able Cain produced only one five-song EP but drew considerable acclaim from critics. Two of the songs, “Fire Flower” and “Charlatan’s Song,” were featured on alternative Christian radio stations. Matt McCabe has since gone on to produce a solo project called *King Never* and to record with his wife Kristy McCabe under the name Clover.

Acappella

Keith Lancaster; Rodney Britt (–1991) // Gary Moyers (+ 1991); Duane Adams (+ 1991, –1991); George Pendergrass (+ 1991, –1996); Wayburn Dean (+ 1991, –1995); Robert Guy (+ 1995, –1999); Steve Reischl (+ 1996, –1999); Kevin Shaffer (+ 1996); Ken McAlpin (+ 1997); Barry Wilson (+ 1997). 1984—*Travelin’ Shoes* (The Acappella Company); 1985—*Conquerors*; 1987—*Better Than Life*; 1989—*Sweet Fellowship*; 1990—*Growing Up in the Lord*; 1991—*Rescue*; 1992—*We Have Seen His Glory*; *Acappella Christmas*; 1993—*Set Me Free*; *Acappella Español*; 1994—*Gold*; *Platinum*; 1995—*Hymns for All the World*; 1996—*Beyond a Doubt*; 1997—*Act of God*; 1998—*The Collection*; 1999—*All That I Need*.

www.acappella.org

An all-male vocal group, Acappella has produced more than a decade’s worth of Christian albums notable for their surprising diversity. The group has defied the apparent limitations of its chosen genre to create a style that *Release* magazine calls “part jazz, part street-corner doo-wop, part praise and worship, and completely captivating.” With sales of more than three million albums and a touring schedule of more than 150 concerts a year, the band has built a substantial international audience. Their album *Hymns for All the World* appeals to this global constituency by featuring vocals in Russian, Portuguese, French, and Spanish.

The group was founded in 1982 by Keith Lancaster, who for some years was not only the lead singer but also producer, manager, songwriter, and head of the band’s independent label. The personnel list above may be incomplete or inaccurate. Acappella has billed itself as a quartet, but on the first three albums only Lancaster and Rodney Britt were listed as members, and on the next two, no credits at all were given. Lancaster apparently retired to a solo career in 1988, but he has retained connections as Acappella’s producer and creative force. By 1991, the group had stabilized somewhat as a quartet consisting of Duane Adams, Wayburn Dean, Gary Moyers, and George Pendergrass. Someone named Steve Maxwell is also said to have sung with Acappella at some undesignated point. In 1988, a spin-off group called **AVB** (or Acappella Vocal Band) was formed from former backup singers.

The album *Conquerors* includes a version of the gospel standard “John the Revelator” (cf. **Phil Keaggy**) in addition to “More Than Conquerors” by **Janny Grein** and “We Will Glorify” by **Twila Paris**. On *Better Than Life*, Lancaster and company offer **Michael W. Smith**’s “How Majestic Is Your Name,” **Ray Boltz**’s “What Was I Supposed To Be,” and several originals. By 1991, Lancaster was writing virtually all of the group’s material, and by 1999 the bulk of the material was contributed by the individual singers. Besides earning recognition in the Christian market, Acappella has gained a reputation among fans of world music and of a capella singing in general. The song “When You’re There” from *Beyond a Doubt* was chosen Best Gospel/Contemporary Christian Song by the Contemporary A Capella Recording Association. Acappella has also done uncredited commercials, including a popular spot for Sony Camcorders.

Lancaster made two solo albums for his Acappella Company label, *Prime Time* (1991) and *The Reason* (1994). He should not be confused with another Keith Lancaster, who led the bands **Bash**, **Bash-N-the-Code**, and **Found Free**.

Acappella Vocal Band

See **AVB**.

According to John

Ed Bunton, bass, voc.; John Waller, gtr., voc.; Jeff Billes; drums (-2002); Jason Hoard, gtr. (-2002) // Matt Adkins, gtr., voc. (+ 2002); John Fisher, drums (+ 2002). 1998—*A2J* (KMG); 2002—*Beyond What I See* (No Box).
www.accordingtojohn.com

An alternative pop band from Atlanta, According to John delivers a sound reminiscent of Toad the Wet Sprocket or **Smalltown Poets**. The group got its start as part of Big House, a youth outreach of First Baptist Church in Woodstock, Georgia, named after an **Audio Adrenaline** song. The ten songs on their debut album are all inspired in some sense by the Gospel of John, and they are all cowritten by lead singer John Waller. Perspectives of the latter John merge with those of the fourth Evangelist to produce an optimistic album with bouncing melodies and hope-filled lyrics. As second-generation Christian music artists, the members of According to John were all raised on **Steven Curtis Chapman** and **Russ Taff**, and their music shows these influences. Critical acclaim has focused especially on songwriting. “Justified” delights in the promise that Christians may live as forgiven sinners, while “Everlasting” celebrates the hope of life beyond death. The song “Nothing Back” was chosen by the family of Columbine shooting victim Cassie Bernall for a tribute video in her honor. After four years, the group resurfaced with the worship-oriented *Beyond What I See*. Lyrics, again, often focus on Scripture. “Standing Ovation” relates the story of the martyrdom of Stephen in Acts 7. “Song of Jabez” is based on the prayer in 1 Chronicles 4:9–10, which had been the subject of a very popular book by Bruce Wilkerson encouraging Christians to use prayer as a means of getting God to provide them with affluent and trouble-free lives.

Christian radio hits: “Justified” (# 9 in 1998); “Remedy” (# 14 in 1999).

Ace Troubleshooter

Josh Abbott, drums; Isaac Deaton, gtr.; Cody Oaks, bass; John Warne, voc. 2000—*Ace Troubleshooter* (BEC).

Ace Troubleshooter is a power-punk band from Minnesota that got its big break when they won a national battle of the bands competition sponsored by the Sam Goody record store chain in 1998. The group has the same sound as **MxPx** and dozens of other Green Day wannabes but is generally more hard-hitting. Their songs feature strong hooks that mollify the usual punk problem of everything sounding alike. Songs with obvious evangelical lyrics mix with more overtly secular material. “1 Corinthians 13” paraphrases the biblical chapter and “Phoenix” describes the process of spiritual rebirth. Complaints about girl problems are also prevalent. “Don’t Trust That Girl” is sort of a modern version of Herman’s Hermits’ “A Must To Avoid.” As *CCM* would note, however, “Yoko” crosses

a line, and its warnings against someone who will “nag you to death” just come off as sexist and mean-spirited.

Acoustic Shack

Laura Misiuk, voc.; Michael Misiuk, gtr. 1991—*Acoustic Shack* (Blonde Vinyl); 1993—*Fret Buzz* (Broken); 1998—*A Distant Bell* (Red Moon); 2001—*Redeeming the Time*.

www.deara19.com

The Southern California duo known as Acoustic Shack (formed in Lake Forest, California, in 1991) has enjoyed more critical acclaim than commercial success. Their debut album produced only one minor hit in the Christian market, and the follow-up went unnoticed in the sales charts—while ranking number eight on *Billboard* magazine’s Critics Choice for top records of the year. Lyrically, most of the songs focused on biblical themes, with some incursions from fundamentalist doctrine (e.g., references to the rapture). *Fret Buzz* moves away from simplistic theology to deal with more life-in-general issues. The second album also demonstrates a musical shift toward a more electric alternative rock sound that would render the group’s name somewhat misleading. *True Tunes* likened the new sound to groups like Sugar or Psychedelic Furs. But there is diversity: “Radio Play” sounds like it could be an R.E.M. song, and Laura pretends she’s Chrissie Hynde on “No Place Like Home.” Highlights of *Fret Buzz* include the opening, “On the Wayside,” and an intriguing cover of Creedence Clearwater Revival’s “Bad Moon Rising.” The group’s third album continues to feature more distorted guitar and heavier percussion. Laura also takes over as principal songwriter on *A Distant Bell*, delivering lyrics expressive of desperation and yearning, set to tunes that start out sparse and gradually build with increased tempo and added layers. *Redeeming the Time* is a collection of classic hymns (“How Great Thou Art,” “Just a Closer Walk,” “I Have Decided,” “Away in a Manger”) mixed with a few modern numbers (**Andraé Crouch**’s “Soon and Very Soon”) and a handful of faith-filled originals, the best of which is “Gloria.” Michael Misiuk is also a member of the band **The Kreedowns**.

For trivia buffs: Laura Misiuk’s brother is Michael Pritzl, lead singer for **The Violet Burning**.

Christian radio hits: “It’s Good to Know” (# 22 in 1992).

Acquire the Fire

Personnel list unavailable. 2000—*Live God Loud* (Pamplin).

Acquire the Fire is not so much a band as an event. The album *Live God Loud* is a live recording of a teen-oriented worship celebration sponsored by Teen Mania. The founder of that group, Ron Luce, serves as worship leader with metal meister **David Zaffiro** playing guitar and producing the album. Songs

include **Lincoln Brewster's** "All I Need" and **Darrell Evans'** "Whom Shall I Fear?" in addition to remodeled versions of the hymns "Just As I Am" and "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus."

A Cross Between

S. Luke Brown; Brishan Hatcher; Aaron Herman. 1999—*A Cross Between* (Benson).

A Cross Between is a contemporary pop trio formed from members of **AVB** (Acappella Vocal Band) who decided to add instruments for a more traditional pop sound. They drew immediate comparisons to general market acts like *NSYNC and the Backstreet Boys. The standout track on their debut album is a cover of the classic rock song "I Just Want to Celebrate," which was a Top 10 hit for Rare Earth in 1971 (cf. **Kim Boyce**). Another song, "Nicole Hadley's Heart" (cowritten by ex-**Allies** Randy Thomas), relates how the organs of a girl killed in Paducah, Kentucky, enabled five other people to live. Other songwriters contributing to the project include Regie Hamm, **Steve Hindalong** (of **The Choir**) and Dan Mukala (of **Mukala**). *Youthworker* magazine described the album as "an interesting blend of harmony-drenched, Beatlesque pop and groove-oriented rock."

A.D.

See **Kerry Livgren**.

Adam Again

Gene Eugene, voc., gtr.; Greg Lawless, gtr.; Riki Michele, voc.; Paul Valadez, bass // John Knox, drums (+ 1990). 1986—*In a New World of Time* (Dark Angel); 1988—*Ten Songs* (Broken); 1990—*Homeboys*; 1992—*Dig* (Brainstorm); 1995—*Perfecta*; 1999—*Worldwide Favourites* (KMG); 2000—*Live at Cornerstone 2000: Gene Eugene/Adam Again Tribute* (M8); 2001—*Remembering Gene* (Marathon).

www.afn.org/~afn45496/a_again

On March 20, 2000, Gene Andrusco died in his sleep at the age of thirty-eight. That untimely death (from an undiagnosed brain aneurism) was a great loss to the Christian music industry, since the man known as Gene Eugene was a consummate producer (200–300 albums by artists ranging from **Crystal Lewis** to **The Prayer Chain** to **Starflyer 59**), the cofounder of Brainstorm Records, and a member of three of Christian music's most innovative groups: Adam Again, the **Lost Dogs**, and **The Swirling Eddies**. The first of these three bands produced five pioneering albums that provide a lasting showcase for Eugene's most distinctive contributions.

With the able assistance of his wife **Riki Michele** and a stable rhythm section, Eugene shaped Adam Again into a band that prioritized musical excellence and lyrical depth over com-

mercial appeal or even accessibility. Reviewers typically described their songs as "introspective," "transcendent," or "cathartic," but rarely used words like "upbeat" or "fun" (for the latter, see **The Swirling Eddies** or the **Lost Dogs**). Eugene's vocal stylings bore such remarkable similarities to those of Michael Stipe that comparisons with R.E.M. were inevitable, yet Adam Again's music had a darker edge and evinced a certain sadness that set them apart from the latter band. Critics praised the group for its intensity, passion, and honesty, yet, as one reviewer put it, "I haven't seen Adam Again play once when I did not feel the urge to cry." Eugene was comfortable appealing to a select constituency. "I'm not looking for **Amy Grant's** audience," he joked to a reporter in 1992. "I want everything on this album (*Dig*) to be a little more difficult than usual." The group believed their faith to be a matter of record and was content to write and sing from that declared perspective without feeling the need to declare it anew on every album (or in every song). They rarely sang about Christ or God, but about life and human relationships, about the hardships of life and the pain of human relationships. What made the songs Christian was no more (and no less) than the fact that self-declared Christians wrote and sang them.

The first album, now long out of print and rare, contains the group's confession of faith and is the only one of the oeuvre that would be recognizable as a Christian record on its own. On "You Can Fall in Love," Eugene sings of Christ, "He was God and nothing less / He came to fill your emptiness." *Ten Songs* is known as Adam Again's "dance record" because of its roots in '60s funk. It contains the memorable "Eyes Wide Open," which warns against a myopic worldview. "Treehouse" likewise critiques the exclusive clubhouse-in-the-sky mentality that some Christians seem to adopt. "I've Seen Dominoes" addresses families and relationships that are falling down. The clearest faith statement comes in the concluding "The Tenth Song," which shares a prayer of thanks for forgiveness in Christ. *Ten Songs* was the only Adam Again album included (at Number Fifty-five) on a 2001 critics' poll of "The 100 Greatest Albums in Christian Music" sponsored by *CCM* magazine. *Homeboys* is less funky in style but more urban in content, featuring a number of songs dealing with the trials of life in the city ("Bad News on the Radio," "Homeboys"). "Save Me" is a cry for mercy and forgiveness written by Michele, and "Hide Away" is a sad song about distance between married lovers, with lyrics by **Steve Hindalong**. Also noteworthy on this third outing are covers of **Marvin Gaye's** "Inner City Blues" and **Terry Scott Taylor's** "Occam's Razor." *Dig* continues to explore the theme of "Eyes Wide Open" in songs like "It is What It Is (What It Is)." Overall, *Dig* has a harder edge to it than previous projects and is perhaps the group's finest album. It closes with "River on Fire," which Eugene considered their

best song, and also features “Worldwide,” which became their best-known song. Eugene would later comment, “when we were approached about putting together a collection of our hits, ‘Worldwide’ was the only one we could come up with.” The song contains a reference to Headman Shambalala, a singer in **Ladysmith Black Mambazo** who was murdered, and asks the rhetorical questions, “Does anyone care about justice?” and “Why should anybody bother?” Its most memorable lines are, “Don’t think I’ll ever understand it / Don’t think it matters if I do / Three billion people in the world / And I only know a few.” *Perfecta* is the group’s most cohesive recording, with a vibe that seems to hold from beginning to end. The album has a ragged, dynamic feel to it—the project was recorded live in the studio with feedback and noises between songs being left on the disc. Eugene described the process behind *Perfecta* as a “three-year jam session” during which the entire group created material out of their musical and spiritual experiences together. The latter comment is intriguing to the voyeuristic since it was during that time (1994) that Eugene and Michele divorced, though the two would remain close and continue to work together. The song “Stone” broaches the subject of a broken relationship specifically, while “Dogjam” and “All Right” seem to speak more obliquely of the issues involved.

For an artist so intimate and vulnerable in his songwriting, Eugene was reticent in interviews and private about his personal life. In the opening words to his favorite Adam Again song he sang, “What would you say if you knew what I was thinking? / Maybe you do, but you know not to dig too deep” (“River of Fire”). He likewise responded defensively to Christian critiques of the group as unnecessarily vague or cryptic: “I kind of revel in the uncertainty of spiritual things and in the mystery of them.”

Michele’s father, Pentecostal minister Johnny Bunch, officiated at Eugene’s funeral, and she eulogized him to the press: “He was caring, sweet, funny, and most of all, just an incredible talent. He’s my favorite songwriter.” In 2000, M8 Distribution released a three-CD tribute to Eugene and Adam Again. It features one disc of songs performed live by the group with vocals by such artists as **Michael Knott** and **Michael Roe** and two discs of concert material from previous years. A year later, Marathon came out with a different tribute set featuring two discs of Eugene’s songs being performed by various artists (**The Altar Boys**, **The Prayer Chain**, **The Violet Burning**, **Starflyer 59**, and others).

For trivia buffs: Gene Eugene had a pre-Adam Again career as a child actor. At age ten he starred as “Young Darren Stevens” in an episode of the TV show *Bewitched* (“Out of the Mouths of Babies”). The next year, he supplied the voice of Rogger Barkley in the animated series *The Barkleys* (they were dogs) and the voice of Flip in the animated series, *The Amazing*

Chan and the Chan Clan, which ran for three seasons. Also at eleven, he played Vince Blaine in the movie “Gidget Gets Married” and Justin in an episode of the TV show *Cannon* (“The Rip Off”).

Oleta Adams

1990—*Circle of One* (Fontana); 1993—*Evolution*; 1995—*Moving On*; 1997—*Come Walk with Me* (Harmony); 1998—*The Very Best of Oleta Adams* (Chronicles).

www.oletaadams.com

Oleta Adams is viewed as a soul singer with gospel roots in the general market and as a gospel singer with secular appeal in Christian circles. She grew up in Yakima, Washington, the daughter of a Baptist minister, singing in church and directing four choirs. As an adult, she ended up in Kansas City, where she recorded two unsuccessful self-funded albums and took to singing cabaret in the rotating Hyatt lounge. Her life changed when the latter establishment was visited by Roland Orzabel and Curt Smith of the alternative rock group **Tears for Fears**. They invited her to sing on two tracks (“Woman in Chains,” “Badman’s Song”) on their definitive album, *The Seeds of Love* (1987). She joined the group for their tour and was sometimes listed as their third member. Orzabel subsequently produced her album *Circle of One*, which produced two hit singles: “Rhythm of Life” and “Get Here.” The latter tune, a Brenda Russell song, hit Number Five on *Billboard*’s Top 40 charts and became something of an anthem for the Gulf War going on at the time. The album went platinum and Adams toured nationally with Michael Bolton. She has not repeated that level of commercial success but has continued to record in the pop market and, in 1995, contributed vocals to another Tears for Fears song, “Me and My Big Ideas,” on their album *Raoul and the Kings of Spain*. With *Come Walk with Me* Adams dove headlong into the contemporary Christian market, serving up an album of songs that testify to faith in Christ.

Circle of One contains Adams’ best-known songs and evinces strong gospel roots throughout. *Evolution* is mostly big pop ballads, such as James Taylor’s “Don’t Let Me Be Lonely Tonight” (featuring David Sanborn) and Billy Joel’s “New York State of Mind.” *Moving On* picks up the tempo with more funky, dance-oriented numbers. *Come Walk with Me* mixes traditional numbers with Adams’ own compositions. Standout cuts include the title track, the soulful “This Love Won’t Fail You,” and “I Will Love You,” which features backing by a **Take 6**-style vocal group called Special Gift. Notably, the 1998 collection album ignored these and other faith songs, selecting only tunes from the first three albums and other side projects. It does include one of Adams’ best songs, a moving rendition of Elton John’s

“Don’t Let the Sun Go Down on Me,” originally found on the *Two Rooms* tribute album for that artist (Mercury, 1991).

Adams rejects any clear distinction between her sacred and secular careers. She speaks rather of songs that testify directly to the message of Christ through their lyrics and of other songs—soulful ones—that tenderize the heart in ways that allow the Spirit to do its work. She tries to mention her faith in every interview, whatever the forum, and she does a gospel set complete with personal testimony as a part of every concert: “I tell them, don’t get scared and run away . . . you won’t get saved tonight if you don’t want to.”

Adams has been nominated for three Grammy awards, including one for Best Pop Vocal Performance—Female (“Get Here”) and one for Best R&B Vocal Performance—Female (“Don’t Let the Sun Go Down on Me”).

Yolanda Adams

1987—*Just As I Am* (Sound of Gospel); 1991—*Through the Storm* (Benson); 1993—*Save the World* (Tribute); 1995—*More Than a Melody*; 1996—*Yolanda . . . Live in Washington*; 1998—*Songs from the Heart* (Verity); 1999—*Best of Yolanda Adams*; 1999—*Mountain High . . . Valley Low* (Elektra); 2000—*Christmas with Yolanda Adams*; 2001—*The Divas of Gospel [with Albertina Walker]* (Uni); *The Experience* (Elektra); 2002—*Believe*.

www.yolandaadams.org

With a voice that is often compared to that of Whitney Houston, Yolanda Adams grew up in Houston, Texas, to become first one of America’s most promising young gospel singers and then a *contemporary* gospel singer with crossover appeal to fans of R&B. Before being discovered by gospel magnate Thomas Whitfield, she was an elementary school teacher who wanted to break into modeling. Her statuesque 6’1” frame and stunning appearance won her a number of jobs in the latter field, but it was her avocation of singing with the Southeast Inspirational Choir that brought the invitation to bid adieu to those first and second graders.

Whitfield guided Adams’ first album of traditional spirituals. Follow-up records in the early ’90s established her as a gospel staple, garnering several Stellar awards (traditional gospel’s version of the Dove or Grammy). *Through the Storm* features her own composition “You Know That I Know,” and *Save the World* includes “The Battle Is the Lord’s” and “Let Us Worship Him.” Then, with *More Than a Melody*, Adams changed gears, adopting a more contemporary, soulful sound. Reaction was mixed. In addition to predictable complaints from gospel fans who think “spiritual” and “worldly” are a twain that should never meet, musical objections were leveled by critics who felt Adams had gone from being something special to sounding like every other adult contemporary songstress. Her cover of the Steve Miller Band’s “Fly Like an Eagle” suffered particular abuse. Still, the album was nominated for a Grammy and

earned Adams a spot on “Soul Train.” The best tracks include “The Good Shepherd” and **BeBe Winans’** “What about the Children?” *Live in Washington* put Adams back in the good graces of the critics, earned another nomination from the Grammys, and snagged yet another Stellar award. That album opens with an impressive seven-minute number, “The Only Way,” that showcases the incredible range and versatility of Adams’ voice. The next album, *Songs from the Heart*, presented traditional hymns and worship songs sung in a diversity of styles. Then Adams switched to the general market label Elektra to broaden her appeal and audience. Her platinum-selling first album for that company (*Mountain High . . . Valley Low*) secured her identification as “the CCM Whitney Houston” (CCM being short for contemporary Christian music). It mixes beat-driven numbers like “Time to Change” with pop balladry (“Fragile Heart”). *The Experience* is a concert album recorded live in Washington, D.C. *Believe* includes an excursion into hip-hop (“I’m Thankful”) and a duet with Karen Clark-Sheard of **The Clark Sisters** (“Fo’ Sho’”) that recalls the work of Destiny’s Child.

Adams’ songs bear witness to the power of faith and prayer to sustain the faithful in the midst of personal struggles. She speaks openly of her own travails. The eldest of six children, she was especially close to her father who died tragically when she was thirteen, and to her grandfather who died a few years later. An abusive marriage ended in divorce shortly after her career as a gospel singer began. She dedicates one song, “In the Midst of it All” (from *Mountain High*), to “the mothers of the church,” saying, “I know you are going through a hard time, but don’t give up . . . I made it out.” She is devoted to numerous children’s charities, including Operation Rebound, which addresses the concerns of inner city children. “My music has evolved with the times,” Adams grants, “but the truth is still the truth, and Jesus Christ is the center of everything I do.”

Dove Awards: 1992 Traditional Gospel Album (*Through the Storm*); 1992 Traditional Gospel Song (“Through the Storm”); 1999 Traditional Gospel Song (“Is Your All on the Altar”).

Grammy Awards: 2001 Contemporary Soul Gospel Album (*The Experience*).

The Advocates

Personnel list unavailable. 1973—*The Advocates* (Dovetail); 1975—*Here I Rest My Case*.

A British pop band in the grand tradition of the Beatles, The Advocates performed hook-laden songs with obvious melodies and lots of organ, a bit like the Grass Roots. Their first album features horns and is more rock and roll than the tamer follow-up. Each record includes an a capella song: “Rebel’s Song” on the first, and the hymn “Man of Sorrows” on the sec-

ond. *Jesus Music* describes the second outing as “a concept album, presenting the claims and evidences of the Christian faith through song.”

Aeturnus

John Gibson, voc., gtr.; Matt Miller, bass; Josh Murray, drums. 1995—*From Blackest Darkness* (Cranial Captivity).

Not to be confused with the doom metal band Solitude Aeternus, this Christian group played hard, fast, death-core music of the same genre but with evangelistic intent. *From Blackest Darkness* begins with a metal version of the Imperial Death March from the movie *Star Wars*. The gospel is seldom evident in the band’s lyrics. One song, “Carnage,” expresses the perspective of a serial murderer (“I kill to live, I live to kill”). Another, “Knee Deep in the Dead,” describes the plight of that individual as he suffers the consequences of hell. Aeturnus liked to play in bars and clubs where they could reach unbelievers with an invitation to receive Christ. “Our lyrics are dark and we address dark issues,” Gibson told *HM* magazine. “We try to convey that a life without Christ is unfulfilled.” After the group broke up, Gibson continued to make music with a group called Dirge.

A Few Loose Screws

Dave Lantz, bass; Del Sauder, voc., gtr.; Matt West, drums. 1996—*Four-O-Five* (Alarma).

The single album by the punk-rock trio A Few Loose Screws was produced by Gene Eugene (of **Adam Again**). Their sound takes its cues from the Ramones or, in Christian circles, **The Altar Boys** or **The Huntingtons**. Thematically, one major topic is girls: appreciating them (“Rule the World”), wanting them (“Matt’s Song”), controlling them (“Girl in My Pocket”). But an even more dominant theme is spiritual longing, expressed primarily through songs that bemoan the potential emptiness of life and extol the need for change. Standout tracks include “How I Feel” and “Rule the World” (the two most upbeat songs, lyrically) and a cover of **Resurrection Band**’s “Can’t Stop Lov’n You.” The album was re-released in 2001 by KMG, packaged unfortunately as part of a two-disc set with a questionable work by **Rainy Days**.

After the Fire (a.k.a. ATF)

Peter “Memory” Banks, kybrd.; Andy Piercy, gtr., bass; Nick Battle, bass (–1978); Ivor Twidell, drums (–1979) // John Russell, gtr. (+ 1978); Peter King, drums (+ 1980). 1978—*Signs of Change* (CBS); 1979—*LaserLove*; 1979—*80-f* (Epic); 1981—*Batteries Not Included*; 1982—*Der Kommissar* (CBS).

www.friends.afterthefire.co.uk

After the Fire was one of the first overtly Christian bands to achieve considerable success in the secular market. Still, they have been largely ignored by the Christian music community in the United States. This may be because their one hit in the American market (“Der Kommissar,” # 5 in 1983) was a cover tune void of obvious spiritual content. The band recorded that song (which had already been a hit by Falco in Germany) only as a concession to their record company. Ironically, the song initially flopped in their native UK, and the group disbanded in frustration shortly before it became a worldwide smash everywhere else. ATF seems destined to be remembered in America as a one-hit wonder. Yet they *are* remembered, as “Der Kommissar” continues to show up on countless soundtracks and compilations of ’80s music. The best-selling album named for that song was actually a greatest hits retrospective of their entire career.

After The Fire was founded by Peter Banks, who took the band’s name from 1 Kings 19:12: “After the fire, came a still small voice.” The group officially shortened its name to ATF in 1981 but continued to be known by both monikers; Banks also changed his first name from “Peter” to “Memory” (with similar inconsistency) to avoid confusion with a guitarist for Yes. In any case, the members of ATF had roots deep in the British Jesus movement. Banks and John Russell had played together in **Narnia**, who recorded a self-titled album for Myrrh in 1974. Andy Piercy was half of the Christian folk duo **Ishmael and Andy**. His partner in that endeavor, Ian Smale, later recorded albums of praise and worship music under the name **Ishmael**, with ATF providing uncredited backup.

The first ATF album was independently produced and enjoyed limited release, but today is regarded by some as a fine instance of the sort of progressive rock also being performed by groups like Yes or Genesis at the time. Every song ranges from seven to ten minutes in length with extended instrumental segues. The change in musical direction evident on their next record reveals that someone in the group had been listening to new-wave. The title *80-f* is a clever phonetic variation on their abbreviated name. *Laser Love* was one of the first albums anywhere to feature the synthesizer-driven sound that was to define ’80s club music. It produced a Top 30 hit in the UK (“One Rule for You”) and brought the band to the attention of the general market. The next two albums were produced by Mack, known for his work with ELO and Queen. ATF toured as the opening act for both of those bands and then opened for Van Halen’s 1982 American tour, inspiring the latter group to adopt the more synthesizer-driven sound evident on their 1984 hit “Jump.” In general, critics praised ATF for playing carefully crafted pop songs with precision and skill, but faulted them for having a predictable, programmed sound that lacked innovation. One critic credited them with having “a large following

among those for whom street credibility comes a long way behind enjoyment.”

The group was always forthright about their faith convictions, even if the lyrics to their songs were not as specific as some fans of Christian music would have wanted. They played the *Greenbelt* Christian music festival (a UK equivalent to *Cornerstone*) several times, interacting with such artists as **Larry Norman** and **Chuck Girard**. The British press regularly referred to them as “a Christian rock band,” sometimes snidely. Indeed, the group’s first hit, “One Rule for You” was written by Piercy as a rebuff to critics who dismissed the band as part of a religious subculture without attending seriously to its music. But ATF also suffered vilification from Christian critics who found them too worldly. Their management once issued a statement affirming the band’s conviction that “entertainment is one of God’s many gifts,” and so defending the production of good music as a godly goal in its own right. After a seventeen-year hiatus, the band began performing sporadic reunion shows in 2000, and these included praise and worship songs in the repertoire.

While ATF was together, Ivor Twidell released solo albums under the name Iva Twydell: *Waiting for the Sun* (Tunesmith, 1978); *Secret Service* (Red Sky, 1981); *Duel* (Red Sky, 1982). Only the last of these was released in America (on Tunesmith); it has a sound similar to ATF and early Genesis recordings. Piercy continues to be a force in Christian music through producing, helming projects by **Matt Redman** and **Kim Hill**. A book about After the Fire called *Dancing in the Shadows* has been written by Julian Barr and is available at their website.

For trivia buffs: Andy Piercy once reviewed the (now classic) live album *How the West Was One* by Christian artists **Phil Keaggy** and **2nd Chapter of Acts** for a British music magazine (*Buzz*, August 1979). He didn’t think much of it, and the review drew a flurry of letters from angry Christian readers. Piercy also drew a regular comic strip for *Buzz* called “Lost and Found.”

Dennis Agajanian

1971—*Come to the Rock* (custom); 1981—*Rebel to the Wrong* (Light); 1986—*Friendly Fire* (Word); 1987—*Where Are the Heroes* (Sparrow); 1992—*Out of the Wilderness* (Asaph); 1993—*There Is a Road*; date unknown—*Just As I Am* (Asaph); *Best Picks*; *Empty Hearts*; *Outlaw, He Will Roll Away Your Stone*; *Pure Acoustic Bluegrass*; *Best Picks 2*.

www.dennisagajanian.com

In 1970, Dennis Agajanian was amazing teenagers at Lutheran Youth Alive congresses with his unbelievable flat pickin’ guitar, rollicking wit, and tearful testimonies of God’s grace. Thirty years later, having done both Vegas and *The 700 Club*, he remained a survivor—one of the few veterans of the Jesus movement to be still recording at the turn of the millen-

nium. But unlike “The Pilgrim” venerated in a Kris Kristofferson song, Agajanian would remain an enthusiastic Christian soldier, not just some worn-out warrior who “prays to make it through another day.” A veteran of modern country, Agajanian has worked with such talents as Ricky Scaggs and **Johnny Cash**. At one point, he was listed in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the “World’s Fastest Flat Picking Guitarist.” Agajanian was born in California and raised on a small farm just north of Los Angeles. Early on, he often performed with his brothers, especially Danny Agajanian, and he has continued to do this from time to time. He also performed with Kentucky Faith, along with future members of **Brush Arbor**. Agajanian describes his sound as “outlaw music,” referencing the Nashville-cum-Austin-based movement of country artists who in the late ’70s became disenchanted with Nashville vogue, but also indicating the counter-cultural tendency of the Christian gospel. “I’m an outlaw for Jesus,” he says.

CCM described *Rebel to the Wrong* as an album “full of knee slapping’ tunes and sorrowful laments about those who find out the hard way.” *Where Are the Heroes* was produced by **Terry Talbot** and the title song was written by **Steve Camp**. The song “She’s a Servant” (written with Talbot) takes up a theme uncommon in Christian music, describing the life of a successful and fulfilled woman who chooses to remain single. *Just As I Am* is an instrumental collection that presents classical, bluegrass, flamenco, and country guitar versions of famous pieces like Bach’s “Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring” and Handel’s “Hallelujah Chorus.” *Out of the Wilderness* includes the Ken Munds song “Come To the Rock” (the title track from Agajanian’s first custom record). The album *Outlaw, He Will Roll Away Your Stone* was recorded with a full six-piece band that took Agajanian to new heights musically. Alongside new versions of “Where Are the Heroes?” and “Via Dolorosa” (originally on the *Heroes* album), *Outlaw* offers **Charlie Daniels’** “Long-Haired Country Boy” and a number of songs that address various struggles of life. “Saigon” spoke powerfully to Vietnam veterans. Over the years, Agajanian has become known for a number of patriotic songs (“Lord, Give Us America”) and for his frequent appearances at Promise Keepers rallies and Franklin Graham crusades. He travels on behalf of Samaritan’s Purse, the humanitarian organization of which Graham is president. In 1986, he published an article in *CCM* magazine about his travels to Lebanon, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Thailand.

For trivia buffs: Agajanian is a stock car race enthusiast, and he has sponsored cars in the Indianapolis 500. He composed the race theme song “Indianapolis 500 Dream” and has served as an unofficial chaplain for many races throughout the country. He says he is known to many of the drivers as “Dennis the Christian.”

Agape

Fred Caban, gtr., voc.; Mike Jungkman, drums; Jason Peckhart, bass (-1971) // Richard Greenburg, bass (+ 1972); Jim Hess, kybrd. (+ 1972). 1971—*Gospel Hard Rock* (Mark); 1972—*Victims of Tradition* (Renrut); 1996—*The Problem Is Sin: Live and Unreleased* (Hidden Vision).

With a sound roughly analogous to early Grand Funk Railroad, Agape was one of the world's first Christian bands to play hard rock music. They released limited quantities of two albums now treasured by collectors. Fred Caban founded the group in 1968 after being converted at a Light Club Coffeehouse (associated with what was to become the Children of God cult) in Huntington Beach, California. The band made its home in Azusa, California, and played regularly at the Salt Company Christian coffeehouse (sponsored by Don Williams' Hollywood Presbyterian Church), where they supposedly inspired **Larry Norman** to play more religiously oriented music. The band's following formed the nucleus for what was ultimately to become the International Agape Ministries (first known as Covina Church in the Park). The original lineup included Lonnie Campbell as female bass player, but she was replaced by Jason Peckhart before the recording of the first album. Jim Hess, who joined for the second album, died of cancer shortly after the band broke up. Richard Greenburg (the *third* bass player) later recorded under the name The Rapid Richard Group, releasing what was essentially a solo album (*Did I See What I Thought I Saw? An Album of Parables*, Homespun, 1977).

The first Agape album, *Gospel Hard Rock*, features a number of songs with one-word titles ("Rejoice," "Freedom," "Happy") that remind historian/critic David Di Sabatino not only of GFR but of Hendrix and Cream. Those analogies at least describe the band's influences and aspirations, if exaggerating their abilities. The music is not actually "hard rock," but more of a blues-based midtempo style that is more rock-oriented than the folk groups associated with Calvary Chapel's Maranatha label. The second album, Di Sabatino continues, is "a more complex blend of blues-rock with jazz-fusion undertones." On both records, the group exhibits an evangelistic fervor in keeping with the revival spirit of the time. "I'm in love with somebody I can't even see," Caban sings in the debut album's opening lyric. "He loved me so much he died on Calvary" ("Blind"). Lyrical profundity, then, is not the band's strength: "I'm so happy / Do you want to know the reason why? / I'm so happy / 'Cause I'm not afraid to die" ("Happy"). Still, Jesus movement historian Frank Edmonson has said that Agape represents "Jesus rock at its crustiest, music which cuts through the thickest defenses of the non-Christian rock fan."

Agape Force

See **Candle**.

Age of Faith

Jimi Ray, voc.; Rick Harwell, gtr. (-1996) // Steven Blair, drums (+ 1996); Drue Bachmann, bass (+ 1996, -1998); Daniel Polydores, gtr. (+ 1996, -1998); David Buchannan, gtr. (+ 1998); Zack Plemmons, bass (+ 1998). 1990—*Age of Faith* (Benson); 1992—*Heart of the Young*; 1996—*Embrace* (Gray Dot); 1998—*The Truth*; 1999—*Still* (Songs of Restoration).

As the personnel list above indicates, Age of Faith has basically consisted of singer/writer Jimi Ray and whoever is playing with him at the time. The group has assumed a number of distinct incarnations since its formation in 1990. It began as a power-pop duo that fashioned itself as a Christian version of Bon Jovi and produced two albums aimed at evangelizing the young with arena anthems. *Age of Faith* is noted for its galloping version of **Donna Summer's** "Unconditional Love" (cf. **The Altar Boys**); the second outing features more diverse styles, more ballads, and guest appearances by the likes of **Rick Elias** and **Bob Carlisle**. Neither record sold particularly well, and the group was dropped from the Benson roster. Back in 1996 with a new label and a new lineup, Ray and company now evinced a more rootsy unplugged sound reminiscent of Hootie and the Blowfish or Counting Crows. Mac Powell (from **Third Day**) sings on the premier single from *Embrace*, "The Love of Jesus." The album also features an impressive cover of Crowded House's "Something So Strong." Two years later, another new lineup released *The Truth*, a more electric album laden with Gin Blossoms hooks. The standout track, "Red Carpet," presents God as offering a royal welcome to the penitent. Continuing their tradition of unpredictable covers, the band also presents its take on **Lone Justice's** "Shelter." On their 1999 offering, *Still*, the group opts for a worship-oriented approach, covering a number of standard songs including **Keith Green's** "Make My Life a Prayer to You" and **Rich Mullins'** "I See You." Age of Faith has toured with numerous general market acts, including Gin Blossoms, Hootie and the Blowfish, and Toad the Wet Sprocket. Grace and forgiveness are the most prominent recurring themes in the Age of Faith repertoire. "I grew up believing God was mad at me all the time," Ray reflects. "We strive to have a grace-oriented ministry."

Christian radio hits: "For Heaven's Sake" (# 25 in 1991); "The Way That You Trust Me" (# 23 in 1992); "The Love of Jesus" (# 3 in 1997).

Angie Alan

1990—*Angie Alan* (Frontline); 1991—*The Bottom Line*.

Angie Alan (b. 1966 in Miami) mixes light soul ballads and dance-pop tunes in the tradition of the L.A. sound associated with such producers as Babyface or the team of Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis. She began singing Christian music while a student at Dallas Baptist College and toured for six months as

part of the Continental Singers. Her albums have been produced by **Tim Miner** (for whom she once sang background vocals) in collaboration with her husband, David Ebensberger. Her self-titled debut record includes “Sunny Side,” a funky dance track, and “Today,” which calls on hearers to pay attention to the needs of the homeless. *CCM* described the songs on *The Bottom Line* as “simple affirmations of faith and reliance on Jesus, peppered with calls to Christian action and social conscience.” The song “Until We Meet Again” is a tribute to murdered rapper **D-Boy**.

Christian radio hits: “Sunny Side” (# 16 in 1990); “The Bottom Line” (# 12 in 1991); “Never Givin’ Up” (# 16 in 1992).

The Alarm

Eddie McDonald, bass; Mike Peters, voc., gtr.; Dave Sharp, gtr., voc.; Nigel Twist, drums. 1983—*The Alarm* [EP] (I.R.S.); 1984—*Declaration*; 1985—*Strength*; 1987—*Eye of the Hurricane*; 1988—*Electric Folklore Live*; 1989—*Change*; 1990—*Standards*; 1991—*Raw*.

www.thealarm.com

Like **U2** (the Irish band with whom they are most often compared), The Alarm is not generally considered to be a Christian band. This may be because their songs tended to be more political than (overtly) spiritual or because only one member of the group (Mike Peters) was explicit about his faith. Nevertheless, there are many fans of contemporary Christian music who claim the band as one of theirs. **Geoff Moore and The Distance** had a Christian radio hit with their song, “Rescue Me.” The Alarm’s debut full-length album, *Declaration*, earned the band a review in *CCM* because—alongside anthems extolling pacifism—it offers a song of hope called “We Are the Light” and one of resistance addressed to “The Deceiver” (“You are not welcome in my life”). But on the follow-up, *Strength*, Peters declares, “I ain’t gonna preach, no I ain’t gonna teach / I’m just gonna sing about the things I need.”

The Welsh quartet came together in the late ’70s as an expansion of the Toilets (Eddie MacDonald and Peters) and first toured under the name Seventeen. They came to the attention of American audiences when they opened (as The Alarm) for **U2**’s 1983 arena tour. The group had a punk, Sex Pistols-inspired sound not unlike that of their headliners, save that Peters and Dave Sharp eschewed electric instruments in favor of amplified acoustic guitars. *CCM* once described their sound as evocative of “the Byrds playing punk-rock.” Over the years, The Alarm scored only minor radio hits (“Strength,” # 61 in 1985; “Rain in the Summertime,” # 71 in 1987; “Presence of Love,” # 77 in 1988; “Sold Me Down the River,” # 50 in 1989), but often received considerable airplay on college-oriented stations.

The Alarm were known in part for their covers of such songs as Neil Young’s “Rocking in the Free World,” **Bob Dylan**’s “Knockin’ on Heaven’s Door,” and John Lennon’s “Working Class Hero.” In addition, however, Peters, Sharp, and MacDonald all contributed original songs, and some of these feature lyrics that lend themselves easily to religious interpretation: “The rock, the rock, the rock, will never let you down,” Peters sings on *Change* (“The Rock”). “Declare Yourself an Unsafe Building” is about making a life-changing commitment to live with integrity. “The Stand” (inspired by the Stephen King book of that title) could have been used for altar calls (“Come on down and meet your Maker / Come on down and make the stand”), but The Alarm never gave altar calls or identified themselves in any other obvious way as the Christian band that some of their fans wanted them to be.

In 1991, both Peters and Sharp embarked on solo careers. The former put together a new act, Poets of Justice, which released a handful of albums: *Breathe* (Crai, 1994), *Feel Free* (Select, 1996), *Rise* (VelVel, 1998), and *Flesh and Blood* (21st Century, 2001). These records sometimes evinced a generic spirituality but only the first displayed any direct connection to matters of faith. A couple of the songs on *Rise* display what Doug Van Pelt (no prude) would denounce as “gratuitous cuss words” in his review for *HM* magazine. Peters then joined ColourSound (with Billy Duffy of The Cult and Craig Adams of The Mission), which released a self-titled album on 21st Century Records in 1999. Sharp, meanwhile, released a Dylanesque romp, *Hard Travellin’* (I.R.S.) in 1991 that garnered more attention and acclaim than any of Peters’ post-Alarm projects; it was followed by *Downtown America* (Dinosaur, 1996). Then in 2000 Peters put together a new group that he called The Alarm 2000 and toured extensively playing the band’s old hits. At this time, Peters granted an interview with *HM* during which he clarified some of his spiritual beliefs and commitments: “Jesus Christ is someone I know, but I think that everyone has to formulate their own relationship with him. . . . He’s much bigger than any dogma. He’s much bigger than any religion. . . . I don’t think the Bible has captured his greatness. He’s much bigger than all of that. And I have a relationship with him that is mine, but I’m sure it is nowhere near the relationship that others have with him.”

Ric Alba

1991—*Holes in the Floor of Heaven* (GlassHouse).

The former bassist for **The Altar Boys** surprised the Christian music market when he produced a cathartic album of songs only vaguely reminiscent of his work with that seminal Christian punk band. The material itself was distinctive, featuring songs that Alba had written after checking himself into

a hospital for an extended period of psychological help. The opening lyric, "Scream 'til the monsters go away," sets the tone for the entire piece, in which Alba reflects on life as an adult through the eyes of a child. "Don't make me sleep in the dark," he sings in "Laughter"; "Don't say you know how I feel / Then leave me there to cry alone," he pleads in "Hold My Hand." Rich in metaphor (the title is a poetic description of stars), the album won acclaim from such notable critics as *CCM's* Brian Quincy Newcomb, while remaining predictably unsuccessful commercially.

Albrecht and Roley (and Moore)

Mike Albrecht, voc., gtr.; Scott Roley, voc., gtr. // Alan Moore, voc., gtr. (+ 1977). 1975—*Albrecht and Roley* (Airborn); 1977—*Gently Flowing Feeling* (White Horse); 1979—*Starlighter* (Spirit); 1980—*Take It to the People*.

An acoustic folk duo/trio from Georgia, the group known as Albrecht, Roley, and eventually Moore was an extension of **Aslan**, with first Albrecht replacing Roley's brother Jeff, and then producer **Ron Moore's** brother Alan being added to the titular lineup. The practice of using the member's surnames as the group's official designation may have been inspired by Crosby, Stills and Nash (and Young), whose lighter styles Albrecht, Roley, and Moore seemed to fancy. The first album has an appealing raw quality. *Jesus Music* says, "picture an unorchestrated Jim Croce or perhaps a demo tape by America and you'll get the idea." *Goldmine* magazine (for record collectors—not a Christian publication) misinterprets the source of inspiration and lists this album as one that "has a good stoned feel to it." In any case, the boys garnered enough respect for stars Bob Hartman (of **Petra**), **John Michael Talbot**, and **Al Perkins** to put in guest appearances on their second outing. The final two releases found the group mellowing out in the direction of adult contemporary Christian radio. **Scott Roley** went on to form a group called City Limits and then to a solo career.

Christian radio hits: "Eyes on the Clouds" (# 22 in 1979).

Aleixa (a.k.a. Sorrow of Seven)

Kevin 131, gtr., kybrd.; Laurel Snapper, voc. // April Lassiter, voc. (+ 1996, -1999). By Sorrow of Seven: 1992—*Red* (Flying Tart); 1993—*Teal*; 1994—*Amber*. By Aleixa: 1996—*Honey Lake* (Liquid Disc); 1999—*Disfigured* (BulletProof).

Aleixa's debut album of industrial techno dance music left mostly pleased reviewers scrambling for mixed metaphors to describe the heterogenous sound. The angelic female vocals summoned tonal images of Sinéad O'Connor, the Cranberries, Missing Persons, or Yaz. But *beneath* those vocals (and sometimes on top of them) were the Trent Reznor-style guitars and programmed synthesizers of audio engineer Kevin 131. "Abba

on acid," *7ball* magazine suggested. "Debbie Gibson in a blender," Kevin himself offered.

Even more noteworthy than the sound were the dark reaches of the lyrics. "I could murder, I could kill / There's something inside of me," one song insists ("I Could Murder"). "I've got a knife that wants to have some fun," another reciprocates ("Spark"). This is dance music? *Christian* dance music? Occasionally, the specifically Christian content does come to the fore, but even then the images are violent. "In Adam we die / through Christ I am born," the song "Non-self" proclaims, before reflecting, "funny that blood could be so sweet / forgiving what once was mine to keep."

Kevin 131, who has also played guitar for **Deitiphobia** and **Argyle Park**, fronted an independent group called Sorrow of Seven with whom he made three demo EPs for Flying Tart records: *Red*, *Teal*, and *Amber*. The last of these features an infamous cover of the Shirley Temple song, "On the Good Ship Lollipop." Laurel Snapper's powerful vocals are featured on all three discs, which contain early versions of songs that would later surface on Aleixa's official debut album ("Non-self," "I Could Murder"). April Lassiter was recruited for vocal chores on *Honey Lake* only. Otherwise, Sorrow of Seven/Aleixa (pronounced *ah-lee-kah*) has always been a duo. Radio attention for the first album tended to focus on the single "Unloved," an anxious cry of self-discovery set to an incongruously celebrative beat. The album also features a bonus, alternative mix of that song by **The Echoing Green**. Aleixa's sophomore release, *Disfigured*, demonstrates musical growth and further experimentation, including the use of horns and saxophone (on "Black and Blue") and guest screaming by Sara Merritt of Pink Daffodils. Snapper's voice also appears modified, with inflections that reveal eastern influence. The title track is a prayer to be "made brand new inside." *Disfigured* features a cover of Duran Duran's "The Reflex."

Snapper, who writes most of the band's lyrics, also works as a staff member for a conservative Republican congressman from Texas. She claims that all of her lyrics are autobiographical, expressive of genuine if deplorable feelings that she and probably everyone must sometimes explore. The Christian witness, she insists, is subtle but real. Rather than presenting people with the gospel upfront, she prefers to raise questions that lead to fruitful dialogue. "My reaction when people shove stuff in my face is to turn away," she told *7ball*. "When people can relate to what they're hearing, it opens doors for discussion."

Allen and Allen

Bruce Allen, kybrd.; Allen T. D. Wiggins, sax. 1994—*Allen and Allen* (CGI); 1995—*A Blazing Grace*; 1996—*Come Sunday*; 1998—*A New Beginning*; 2001—*Love Sweet Love* (Allen and Allen).

The instrumental duo of Allen and Allen produces urban jazz music with a contemporary gospel spin. Their albums often feature guest vocalists and other performers. For instance, on the third outing Daryl Coley sings the Duke Ellington classic “Come Sunday,” and Albertina Walker sings “You Don’t Know What the Lord Has Done for Me.” In general, the albums have become progressively eclectic and more appealing to a younger, hipper audience. *Allen and Allen* is fairly straightforward modern jazz. The later records add funkier beats and even a dose of rap. *Love Sweet Love* takes its title from a cover of the Bacharach/David standard, “What the World Needs Now,” and includes guest vocals from members of **Take 6** on the song “Jesus, the Mention of Your Name.”

Allies

Bob Carlisle, gtr., voc.; Randy Thomas, voc., gtr.; Matt Chapman, bass (–1992); Jim Erikson, drums (–1992); Sam Scott, kybrd. (–1987) // Brian Fullen, drums (+ 1992); Mark Hill, bass (+ 1992); Scott Sherriff, kybrd. (+ 1992). 1985—*Allies* (Light); 1986—*Virtues*; 1987—*Shoulder to Shoulder* (DaySpring); 1989—*Long Way from Paradise*; 1990—*The River*; 1992—*Man with a Mission*; 1995—*The Light Years* (Light).

Remembered primarily as the first successful pairing of **Bob Carlisle** and Randy Thomas, the Allies produced classic rock-pop albums that were generally ahead of their time for the Christian market in the late '80s. Before the Allies, Thomas was already well known in Christian circles for his role in the highly influential group, **Sweet Comfort Band** (which also included **Bryan Duncan**). The demise of that seminal act led him to contact old friends for a reunion of ex's from two previous outings: he had played with Carlisle and Jim Erikson in **Psalm 150** (which also included future members of **Andraé Crouch's** Disciples, Damn Yankees, and Night Ranger) and with Sam Scott and Matt Chapman in a group called Sunrise. Thus in 1984 the Allies were born in San Bernardino, California. In later years, Chapman would turn up playing bass in **Clash of Symbols**, and Carlisle would earn fame for his sentimental ballad “Butterfly Kisses,” written with Thomas. Besides penning that song, Carlisle and Thomas wrote “Why'd You Come in Here Looking Like That?” for Dolly Parton. Thomas would also become a member of **Identical Strangers**.

The first two Allies albums demonstrate a tendency to deal with social issues from a spiritual perspective: “Pardon Me” from the first album encourages children to forgive parents for the inadequacies of their upbringing, while “Prayer for the Children” on the second record addresses the issue of child abuse. Also on the sophomore release, “Jacque Remembers” relates Bob's gratitude for his wife's love, and “Let's Fall in Love (All Over Again)” seeks to jar the conscience of those who might be considering divorce. The family orientation of such songs was to become a Carlisle/Thomas hallmark—years

before “Butterfly Kisses.” Both albums were hurt by image-marketing that tried to capitalize on a current spiritual warfare fad (cf. **Petra**, **Matthew Ward**) by presenting the group in paramilitary outfits. CCM said these made them look like neo-Nazis and suggested a sound more in keeping with metal than pop. The group's third album, *Shoulder to Shoulder*, was self-produced in the band's own studio and was more successful commercially. The album emphasizes melody and hooks and capitalizes on the strength of Carlisle's voice on such pop anthems as “You're All I Needed” and “Looking on the Outside,” as well as on the oddly paired “It's Never Easy” and “Easy as 1, 2, 3.” *Long Way from Paradise* captured the attention of critics by displaying more of a garage-band sound. It closes with a cover of the **Elvis Presley** hit “Crying in the Chapel,” and also includes a send-up of Muddy Waters' “Mannish Boy” entitled “Christian Man.” CCM critic Thom Granger regards *Long Way from Paradise* as the Allies' masterpiece. It was the group's only album to make a list of “The 100 Greatest Albums in Christian Music” (at Number Sixty-nine) prepared by CCM in 2001. *The River* continues in this vein, though less successfully, with the soulful “Take Me to the River” (not an **AI Green** cover) and '50s style “Carried Away.” The group goes for hard rock (à la Van Halen) on “Rock 'n' Roll Angel” and offers a plodding epic with the ten-minute “Can't Stop the River.” *Man with a Mission* finds a re-formed group mostly returning to the mellow pop sounds of the earlier material. “In My Life” (not a Beatles cover) is an infectious sing-along piece. “I'm Crying” is Carlisle's testimony regarding the death of his father.

Throughout their career, the Allies struggled to find a musical identity and were sometimes overwhelmed by the eclecticism that could also be their strength. Songs like “Take Me Back” and “Crying” are gorgeous pop ballads; title tracks “Man with a Mission” and “Long Way from Paradise” are bluesy rockers. Also mixed into the stew are Journeyesque anthems (“All Day, All Night”), '60s bubblegum pop, and mellow numbers that certain critics would describe as pabulum. Lyrically, the Allies tended to promote Jesus as the answer to personal and social problems, sometimes in a more simplistic way than Carlisle or Thomas would advocate in later years. In 1989, Thomas told CCM magazine, “As Christian songwriters, Bob and I always feel the pressure to ‘redeem’ the song or resolve it in a way that people have come to expect.”

Christian radio hits: “Surrender” (# 3 in 1985); “Don't Run Away” (# 9 in 1985); “If You Believe” (# 6 in 1987); “How Much Love” (# 2 in 1988); “It's Never Easy” (# 7 in 1988); “Shoulder to Shoulder” (# 12 in 1988); “Take Me Back” (# 12 in 1989); “All Day, All Night” (# 14 in 1989); “Cryin' in the Chapel” (# 7 in 1989); “Trust in God” (# 4 in 1989); “I Wanna Be Like You” (# 22 in 1990); “Someone to Turn To” (# 11 in 1991); “Take Me to the River” (# 20 in 1991); “Grand Facade” (# 21 in 1992); “In My Life” (# 13 in 1992).

All Saved Freak Band

Mike Berkey, voc.; Ed Darkest, gtr.; Tom Eritano, drums; Rob Galbreath, kybrd., gtr.; Larry Hill, voc., kybrd.; Tom Hill, drums, bass; Morgan King, bass; Joe Markko, voc., gtr.; Randy Markko, bass (d. 1971); Kim Massmann, violin; Pam Massmann, cello; Tom Miller, voc. (d. 1971); Glenn Schwartz, gtr.; et al. 1973—*My Poor Generation* (Rock the World); 1976—*Brainwashed*; 1976—*For Christians, Elves, and Lovers*; 1980—*Sower* (War Again).

One of the most original bands in the history of contemporary Christian music sprang from an Ohio commune of Jesus freaks whose future would prove bizarre and tragic. The All Saved Freak Band was the musical outreach of Larry Hill's Church of the Risen Christ, and various members of the community's transient population performed with the group at different times. Tom Miller and Randy Markko died in a car accident in 1971 and so may or may not have contributed to recordings (Miller was a leader of the SDS and one of the Kent 25, the group of students who instituted the riots that preceded the shootings at Kent State University in 1970). **Phil Keaggy** supposedly played with the group before joining **Glass Harp**, but he does not seem to appear on any of the recordings. Still, the list of those who definitely did participate contains some impressive names: the Massmann sisters (Kim and Pam) are daughters of Dr. Richard Massmann, prestigious conductor of the Minnesota University Orchestra. Glenn Schwartz is the fabled guitarist who fronted the James Gang and **Pacific Gas and Electric**. In the late '60s Schwartz was considered one of the finest blues guitarists in the world. His work with James Gang was legendary, though he actually left that group (replaced by Joe Walsh) before they made any of their recordings. Around 1968, he got saved at the most famous of all Christian coffeehouses, **Arthur Blessitt's** His Place on Sunset Strip. He founded **Pacific Gas and Electric** (later called PG&E, when the real Pacific Gas and Electric Company threatened to sue) and recorded what was to be their only major hit ("Are You Ready?" # 14 in 1971). While a member of this band, he played an instrumental role in the conversion of Rick Coghill, who later played with the group **Lamb**. Apparently Schwartz's family had him committed to an insane asylum, but after being released he joined the Ohio commune.

One-time Assemblies of God minister Larry Hill had founded the Church of the Risen Christ (first called Harper's Field Community Bible Church) in the late '60s. It was a Christian commune overseen by Hill and his right-hand prophetic Diane Sullivan. Initially, they focused on street witnessing to lost souls out and about in Cleveland or to students at Kent State. The musical group was used only to attract crowds. After Schwartz and the talented Massmanns joined, however, the emphasis changed to focus primarily on the band. The community moved to a farm near Orwell, Ohio, where everyone

worked to support the band's ministry. Hill kept total control over all finances. ASFB toured extensively and was even named the official 1971 Mardi Gras band in New Orleans, designated to play the Mayor's Ball at City Hall. Meanwhile, Larry Hill had visions of the end of the world, which he published and declared the equivalent of Scripture. He determined that when redemption came, only members of his select group would be saved and so insisted that any who left the community's "Arc of Safety" would be damned for all eternity. The community began to stockpile weapons and to train in martial arts. Then Hill designated all women in the group to be his inner circle and sexual servants. Men were relegated to living in a barn and were periodically whipped or humiliated for various infractions. Eventually, government agencies intervened amid allegations of child abuse, and Sullivan voluntarily incriminated herself on all accounts. Hill reportedly fled the state to avoid prosecution.

The four albums by ASFB fluctuate between songs driven by Schwartz's guitar licks and ones that showcase the sweet vocals and baroque strings of the Massmann sisters. Hard rock and folk tunes intertwine, with flourishes of classical influence. The first album, *My Poor Generation*, capitalizes on Schwartz's firepower on only a couple of songs ("Great Victory," "Daughter of Zion"), but these feature harder edged Christian music than almost anyone else was considering at the time (but cf. **Agape**). The album opens with a folk-rock protest song ("Elder White") in the tradition of **Bob Dylan's** "Ballad of Hollis Brown." The title track is a melodic pop song that seems intended as a response to Pete Townsend's "My Generation," lamenting the loss of youth to drugs and profligacy. Kim Massmann contributes a lovely rendition of the 23rd Psalm, and two otherwise unknown members, Carole and Morgan King, sing a duet that memorializes their lost colleague, "Tom Miller." The latter song is so remarkably reminiscent of Peter, Paul, and Mary that one may have to listen twice to be sure the Freaks didn't somehow obtain a Peter, Paul, and Mary outtake. But then they depart from the folk tradition completely with a slow blues number, "Ancient of Days." *My Poor Generation* also features "There Is Still Hope in Jesus," written in 1969 by Joe Markko as a theme song for Hill's aborted radio show and augmented now by spoken word testimonies and a brief sermon typical of the evangelical preaching that marked Jesus movement revivals. The album closes with another beautiful Massmann number, "Flowers of Time," which takes its inspiration from the concluding words of Romans 8. Hill sings lead on many of the songs on this debut ASFB album, and he does so quite admirably. *Jesus Music* lists *My Poor Generation* as a "totally essential Jesus rock album."

The most focused ASFB album is *For Christians, Elves, and Lovers*. Released simultaneously with *Brainwashed*, this record is loosely based on the works of J. R. R. Tolkien, which the

group interprets in light of Christian spirituality and symbolism. Schwartz contributes two new rockers, “Waterstreet” and “Old Man Daniel,” which have little to do with the theme. The Massmanns and Hill offer appropriately light and magical songs with titles like “Elfin Chimes,” “By the Fire,” and “Merry Go Round.” A brooding “Theme of the Fellowship of the Ring” opens the second side. Interspersed with these Middle Earth fantasies are musical reflections on Scripture: “The 100th Psalm” is performed in what *Jesus Music* calls “a slow boogie style mixing fuzz bass with plucked strings and deep hums—just the kind of thing Tolkien’s dwarves might have concocted.”

If *For Christians* was intended as edification for the church, its companion *Brainwashed* seems to be directed to the unsaved. Mike Berkey calls on those who want peace and love to “Wake Up to Jesus” in the album’s hand clappin’, foot stompin’ opener, “Peace Lovin’ Rock ‘n Roll.” Schwartz humorously delivers his testimony amidst inspiring blues licks in “Messed Up” and in “Ode to Glenn Schwartz.” Other tunes like “Seek Him” and “Don’t Look Back” feature a psychedelic boogie sound that Canned Heat might have been proud to own. The song “Frog Alley” is a musical wonder but, directed at lower-income blacks who lived near the community, displays startling racial insensitivity. With Schwartz in the foreground, the Massmann sisters have a much more subdued role on this record, but they manage to provide warmth and mystery here and there (“Our Answer”). “Lonely” is perhaps their most melodic, happy song. Reviewing the album in 1976, *Harmony* magazine noted, “the ASFB seems to be particularly adept at composing haunting (if not eerie) songs.” Indeed, that word *eerie* turns up in quite a few reviews of their work.

By the time *Sower* was released, the community had degenerated into infamy and the band was no more. Nevertheless, the album presents what many critics consider to be their best work, with Joe Markko dominating the vocals and other members exercised by an apocalyptic fervor that seems to ratchet everything up a few notches. The usually reserved Massmanns explode with the inflammatory but impassioned “Prince of the International Kaleidoscope” (apparently a rant against the papacy, though the Rockefellers, the Jesuits, and the John Birch Society all get a few whacks as well). Schwartz pulls out all stops on “All Across the Nation,” which features a main riff borrowed from Mountain’s “Mississippi Queen.” The band’s constant producer, Rob Galbraith, delivers his own version of “The Old Rugged Cross” as an appropriate finale. At least some of the material on *Sower* dates from 1971.

An announcement for a fifth ASFB album (called *Vow*) appeared in *Harmony* magazine in 1980, but such a record does not appear to have been released. As of 2000, Hill, the Massmanns, and Laura Markko (Randy and Joe’s sister) continued to live together on an Ohio farm. Schwartz retired to Cleveland

where he lives quietly with his brother and does not perform. Joe Markko became a minister with the Assemblies of God.

All Star United

Christian Crowe, drums; Ian Eskelin, voc.; Patrick McCallum, kybrd.; Brian Whitman, gtr. (–1997); Gary Miller, bass (–1998) // Dave Clo, gtr. (+ 1998); Adrian Walther, bass (+ 1999). 1997—*All Star United* (Reunion); 1999—*International Anthems for the Human Race*; 2000—*Smash Hits* (Essential); 2002—*Revolution* (Furious).

All Star United burst on to the scene of late ’90s Christian music about the same time that ska groups (**The Supertones**, **Five Iron Frenzy**) were making an impression and **DC Talk** was ruling the airwaves. Formed in Nashville in 1996, they were immediately identified as part of a new trend toward “fun music,” a label they well deserved. An ASU concert was first and foremost a party (or as reviewers were fond of saying, a “circus”). Blowing bubbles, leading the audience in the twist, donning ridiculous costumes, dashing frantically about on stage—this band would do whatever it took to be sure a good time was had by all. Their basic sound (described as a “’90s update of the Turtles” or “Oasis meets the Monkees”) was so happy-go-lucky as to inspire amusement, and this was augmented through comical, tongue-in-cheek lyrics. The group initiated a retro-pop turn in Christian music that would soon be taken up in secular circles when bands like Smash Mouth mimicked them in content and style. Indeed, the latter group’s biggest hit (“All Star”) almost seems to have been written in tribute to their Christian forebears.

Singer/songwriter **Ian Eskelin** is clearly the group’s leader. Formerly with **Code of Ethics**, he also enjoyed some success as a solo artist. In fact, the band originated as backing artists for what was intended to be a solo project. Patrick McCallum was recruited from the group **The Echoing Green**.

The first album features the song “Smash Hit,” an irresistible Beatles-style ditty that pokes fun at the shallow consumerism of the Christian marketplace: “Join his name to any cause / Drop his name to get applause / This Jesus thing / It’s a smash hit.” The fact that the song became one of the year’s most requested rock singles produced an irony not lost on its performers. But the song is only one of several bright spots on the debut album. The record opens with “La La Land,” a hilarious send-up of Christians who think their faith guarantees them various temporal rewards: the Bible quoter who relies on “five happy verses,” the evangelist who promises “a claim on power and wealth,” and the fool who hopes his Jesus decal will save him from speeding tickets. All these are contrasted with saints and martyrs who surely would have demanded a better deal “if only they’d known their rights.” The next song, “Bright Red Carpet,” uses the image of entrance to an Oscars-like awards show to question whether the status-conscious will

stroll the carpet at the most important opening of all, the kingdom of heaven. Other standout songs include the worshipful “Savior of My Universe,” the sweet “Tenderness,” and the bubbly “Beautiful Thing.” Another song, “Torn,” provides a brief departure from the album’s light tone to take a poignant look at the sort of Christian struggle described by the Apostle Paul in Romans 7: “I’m torn in two / By what I should / Or should not do / Will you wait for me / If I run from you?”

International Anthems shows progression musically from the retro ’60s sound to more of a retro ’80s style—influences of Abba, Elton John, and Blondie are noticeable. The album was produced by Neill King (Green Day, Elvis Costello, Madness) who Eskelin says (gratefully) “didn’t have a clue how Christian records ought to sound.” From “Big Rock Show” (the opening, crunching rocker) through “Theme from Summer” (a happy nod to the Beach Boys) to “Thank You, Goodnight” (the appropriate prayerful closing song—though two hidden tracks follow), the album engages a diversity of styles with occasional flourishes of horns or strings. “Hurricane Baby” (one of the hidden tracks) is actually performed twice, once as a cabaret and then again the way Stray Cats-era Brian Setzer would have done it. Despite the variety of sound, Eskelin’s penchant for humor and sarcasm remains constant: “Worldwide Socialites Unite” exhorts the status-conscious (his favorite target) to “keep the light in socialite”; “If We Were Lovers” plays on the double entendre of its title, using seductive language to invite Christians to become lovers of all people; “Popular Americans” pokes fun at airs of superiority stereotypically evidenced by Americans (and Christians); “Superstar” ridicules a culture of hero worship. Despite universally favorable reviews, *Anthems* lacked the novelty of ASU’s first record and did not capture the attention (or dollars) of listeners to the same degree. A year after its release, a seemingly premature collection of hits was replacing it in the racks. That album (*Smash Hits*) does include two new relationship-themed songs (“Hang On,” “Baby Come Back”) that are quite worthy, but its exclusion of “La La Land” is inexplicable.

The 2002 album *Revolution* includes “Kings and Queens,” a song that Eskelin says is about “the idea that we are all future royalty waiting to receive our crowns.” “Sweet Jesus” is a personal worshipful tune, and “Global Breakdown” is a song that Eskelin says he wrote on September 11, 2001, while watching the events of that day unfold on CNN.

Christian radio hits: “Saviour of My Universe” (# 2 in 1997); “Tenderness” (# 6 in 1997); “Beautiful Thing” (# 13 in 1997); “Superstar” (# 4 in 1999); “Thank You, Goodnight” (# 4 in 1999).

All Together Separate

Dex Alexander, voc., kybrd.; Ben Rayls, drums; Charles Rumahlewang, bass, kybrd.; Andrew Shirley, gtr. 1999—*All Together Separate* (Arden); 2001—*Arden Worship: All Together Separate Live*.

www.alltogetherseparate.com

The group All Together Separate formed at California Baptist Bible College and cut its musical teeth performing for camps and various student conferences. The band’s debut album consists of original material played in a mainstream style of R&B-inflected rock; it was nominated for the 2000 Dove award for Best Rock Album. A critic for *Christian Music* thought, “ATS is perhaps the closest thing to an Earth, Wind, and Fire-type sound that Christian music has ever produced.” The Earth, Wind, and Fire connection is especially noticeable on “No Condemnation,” but other tracks (“Face to Face”) have a layered, textured sound more reminiscent of the Dave Matthews Band. The opening track, “On and On,” is probably the best song musically, an all-out rock number with the bass defining its distinctive groove. All Together Separate is a ministry band and all four group members testify to their faith in language representative of their denominational heritage, speaking forthrightly of a “personal acceptance of Christ” as the ideal turning point of each individual’s life. A primary theme of their album, however, is praise and worship. The song “Paradigm” is noteworthy: it begins softly and builds to a passionate conclusion, with the dreadlocked Dex Alexander screaming, “I give my life to you, so I may gain it back again.” The multiracial composition of All Together Separate also gives them opportunity to testify to the inclusive nature of God’s kingdom. Alexander says he hopes the group can “play a small part in showing the hope of Christ to our generation, to help them see themselves the way God sees them.” In 2001, the band released a live worship album as part of a series of projects from their label (cf. **Satellite Soul**, **Skillet**). Recorded at their home church (Harvest Christian Fellowship in Riverside, California), the latter album features such modern worship songs as **Delirious?**’s “Did You Feel the Mountains Tremble?” and **Amy Grant**’s “We Believe in God.” **Ta’ta Vega** provides guest vocals on “My Soul Finds Rest in You Alone.”

The Alpha Band

T Bone Burnett, voc., gtr.; David Mansfield, gtr.; Steven Soles, gtr., voc.; David Jackson, bass (–1977); Matt Beton, drums (–1977) // Bill Maxwell, drums (+ 1978); David Miner, bass (+ 1978). 1976—*The Alpha Band* (Arista); 1977—*Spark in the Dark*; 1978—*Statue Makers of Hollywood*; 1994—*Interviews* (Edsel).

www.tmtm.com/sam

The Alpha Band was an outgrowth of **Bob Dylan**’s communal 1976 Rolling Thunder Revue. Dylan had assembled some of the finest country and blues musicians he could find for the long, successful tour. **T Bone Burnett**, David Mansfield, and **Steven Soles** were all alumni of the tour, and they stayed together to play their own Dylanesque music. The

group released three albums (*Interviews* is a compilation) that were more critically acclaimed than commercially successful. The trio of guitarists gave the band a distinctively eclectic sound, which may have been as much a weakness as a strength. At times, they produced a retro-Beatles sound like that of Fleetwood Mac; other times the more predictable Americana sound of other Dylan protégés (e.g., The Band, Grateful Dead) came through. *Spark in the Dark* includes a cover of Dylan's "You Angel You" and features Ringo Starr on drums for two tracks. *The Statue Makers of Hollywood* is a sarcastic project that mocks the superficial esteem associated with celebrity. Bill Maxwell of **Andraé Crouch and the Disciples** joined the band for this third album, and Crouch arranged the background vocals.

All of the members of The Alpha Band were Christians, but they did not create records for the Christian music subculture, nor did they view their art in any primary sense as a vehicle for communicating their faith. Still, all three of The Alpha Band's albums contain some songs that touch explicitly on matters of faith and others that express a general worldview that challenges the dominant values of materialism. By the final project, some secular reviewers would complain that Burnett's "moralizing has become a bit strident." For some, The Alpha Band's albums represent an early entry of Christian music into the general marketplace. Historically, The Alpha Band is also significant for the influence they reportedly had on Dylan's 1979 conversion and for helping to launch Burnett's solo career. **Steven Soles** recorded a couple of solo projects also, in addition to producing albums for the **Seventy Sevens** and other Christian artists associated with the artistic Exit label; he then became manager for **Peter Case**.

The Altar Boys

Ric Alba, bass, kybrd.; Jeff Crandall, drums; Mike Stand, voc., gtr.; Steve Panier, gtr. (- 1984, + 1989); 1984—*Altar Boys* (M.R.C.); 1985—*When You're a Rebel* (Broken); 1986—*Gut Level Music* (Frontline); 1987—*Against the Grain*; 1989—*Forever Mercy* (Alarma); 1991—*The Collection*; 2000—*Live at Cornerstone 2000* (M8); *Mercy Thoughts*.

www.altarboys.com

As a seminal punk-rock trio, The Altar Boys gave Christian music a decade of unabashedly evangelical lyrics set to high energy riffs. They were founded in 1982 by **Mike Stand**, who has since gone on to pursue a solo career and to front the group **Clash of Symbols**. **Ric Alba** has also released a solo project. Stand's brother Kevin Lee (Annis) played with **Lifesavors** and **LSU**. Producer **Terry Taylor** has said of The Altar Boys, "One would be hard pressed to find another rock 'n' roll band in contemporary Christian music for whom the word 'passionate' is more fitting."

The first two albums did not see wide release. Radical for their time (in Christian circles at least), they demonstrate promising musicianship, though the several songs all tend to exhibit a singular plan of attack: a Ramones-inspired fast drive that made one critic say they sounded "like 33 1/3 LPs being played at 45 RPM." Most noteworthy, however, is the way The Altar Boys translate brash punk attitude into brazen profession of faith. Songs like "I'm into God" (which actually turns up on both of their first two records) evinces an audacity that is remarkable for a time when many Christian artists were looking for subtle or sneaky ways to talk about spiritual matters. The Altar Boys were into God and into Jesus, and they didn't much care whom that offended. In this regard, they did for one generation what **DC Talk** ("I'm not into hiding") did for another.

Gut Level Music brought the band national attention. Produced by **Terry Taylor** of **Daniel Amos** and featuring a cover of **Donna Summer**'s "Unconditional Love" (cf. **Age of Faith**), the group now embodied a sound more likely to be compared to the Clash or even to Bruce Springsteen than to the Ramones. The record opens with what was to become the group's best-known song, Stand's "You Are Loved," an anthemic rallying cry of affirmation. It also contains "You Found Me," which would be covered a decade later by **MxPx**. In a rather different vein, Alba's "Life Begins at the Cross" displays theological depth, inspiring critic Brian Quincy Newcomb to muse, "it's practically a Lenten hymn, worth publication in a postmodern hymnal." Still, the band retains their punk credentials through songs with an anti-institutional edge ("I'm Not Talkin' about Religion," "I Question It"). *Against the Grain*, also produced by Taylor, continues the development toward Springsteen-inflected working man's rock. Most noteworthy, perhaps, is the more pronounced empathy with troubled souls and the concern for a broader social ethic. Whereas *Gut Level Music* opened with the reassuring "You Are Loved," this album kicks off with "Fallen World" and continues with "Kids Are on the Run," "Hearts Lost in Nowhere," and "Broken." The album seeks to establish a common base between Christians and humanity in general. "Is the human sound just a scream?" an Alba composition asks ("Human Sound"). The title song provides something of an answer, with retrospective allusion to an earlier album title: "Love is what we need / It goes against the grain / If you want to be a rebel, maybe now's the time."

The olive branch that the Boys offered the general market with *Against the Grain* was accepted, and some doors opened for them to play in secular clubs. They even opened for the ironically named but very secular band, Jesus and Mary Chain. Still, the Boys' career was winding down. Stand recorded his first solo album in 1988 (enigmatically titled *Do I Stand Alone?*), then collaborated with the group one more time for

Forever Mercy. Produced by Steve Griffith of **Vector**—who also cowrote several songs—the album was a suitable finale, foreshadowing the new directions Stand and Alba would pursue while retaining a basic Altar Boys’ crunch. Steve Pannier, an original Altar Boy who had left to form Fourth Watch, returned to add bluesy guitar on such standout tracks as “Ride This Train.” The group reunited for a concert in 2000 that was released by M8 Distribution. That same year, Mike Stand put out *Mercy Thoughts*, a collection of twenty live cuts from his concerts (both with the Boys and as a solo artist) culled over an eight-year period. As of 2001, Stand was teaching music full time at an elementary school and playing worship music (with his brother Kevin Lee) for a youth group on Wednesday and Sunday nights.

For trivia buffs: Before hooking up with Stand and Alba, Crandall had a brief stint as a member of **Children of the Day** (about 180 degrees from The Altar Boys in musical style).

The Altered

Chuck Ash, voc., gtr.; Jeremy Ash, drums; Justin Bickers, gtr.; Buck Weiss, bass. 1997—*Yours Truly* (1997).

A small-town quartet from Illinois called The Altered produced a debut album of Midwest rock. Youth pastor Chuck Ash formed the group with his brother Jeremy, cousin Buck Weiss, and friend Justin Bickers. The band’s name was taken from the William Hurt movie *Altered States*. The group was discovered in some sense by Peter King of **Dakota Motor Co.**, who directed several videos that helped them to get noticed. Matt Slocum of **Love Coma** and **Sixpence None the Richer** adds cello and guitar on the album. Chuck Ash said he understood the band’s vocation as “a ministry” in the broad sense, but he did not seek to be overtly evangelistic in his lyrics or stage shows. The ministry takes place as people notice “something different and have to attribute that difference to something.” The song “Low” (not a Cracker cover) was nominated for a 1998 Dove award (Modern Rock/Alternative Song of the Year). Taking its cue from Ecclesiastes, it translates that book’s philosophical musings about life without God into the simple confession, “I’m wasted without you.” Another song, “Forty-Two,” adapts the psalm of that number into a simple rock ballad, and “Ooh, Where Are You?” laments the loss of a friend who strayed from the narrow road. The title song is nicely reprised in an acoustic version as a hidden bonus track. The Altered disbanded after recording only one album, and Chuck and Jeremy Ash reemerged as a duo called **Ash Mundae**.

Rick Altizer

1998—*Blue Plate Special* (KMG); 1999—*Neon Fixation*; 2001—*Go Nova* (True Tunes).

www.rickaltizer.com

Although he is a licensed Nazarene minister who oversees worship at a church in a Nashville suburb, Rick Altizer defies whatever expectations those aspects of his résumé might conjure. “I won’t do Christian fluff,” he vowed to KMG executives before signing with that label, and indeed he hasn’t. The singer/songwriter has collaborated with ex-King Crimson guitarist Adrian Belew on alternative-pop albums that travel in the same stream as The Cars or Elvis Costello, but are really too innovative for easy comparison. The title song from his first album expresses revulsion at what is advertised as “special” but is in fact only “yesterday’s chicken . . . the same thing with cole slaw.” Altizer has been determined not to serve up such musical mediocrities.

Aside from Belew’s guitar, Altizer plays all the instruments on *Blue Plate Special*, but he credits these to various fictitious incarnations of himself whose photos are displayed in the packaging—an indication of the somewhat wacky humor that attends the project. The songs themselves also seem to arise from various incarnations. The disparity between the rocking opener “Make a Monkey” (which ends its verses with almost-quotes from Beatle songs) and the appropriately atmospheric “Oxygen Tank” recalls aural juxtaposition of Billy Idol’s “Rebel Yell” and “Eyes Without a Face.” Is this really the same artist performing both tunes? Then, on “In L.A.” (an indictment of big-city indifference), Altizer does a credible Tom Petty imitation. But Altizer wears each guise authentically, grounding every mutation in solid song construction that is definitively his own. The album’s first single, “How Many,” muses on the greatness of God (“How many broken hearts have you mended? How many prayers have you heard?”) and smallness of humans (“How many fears do I hold on to? How many sins . . .?”). “River of Grace” is a soulful worship song on which Belew’s guitar seems literally to flow. Altizer’s best received songs, however, have been the ones on which he goes Dylan: “Jan the Best” (an ode to his wife) and “When You Walked up That Hill” (a “Were You There?”-type spiritual about the crucifixion).

Neon Fixation continues in the same vein as the first album, with an overall theme stated in the title song: the human tendency to be attracted by artificial light as opposed to the light of God. Comparing the sophomore project to the debut, *Musicforce* notes, “the unforgettable hooks, the rapier wit, and the spiritually potent lyrics are (again) in evidence.” Songs like “Disco Ball,” “TV Preacher,” and “Ray Guns and Plastic Flash” betray the sort of punchy pop and good humor associated with **All Star United**, while others (“Let It Go,” “Surrender to You,” “Untitled”) continue in the folk-rock tradition of the first album’s best material. Belew produces six of the eleven tracks. The centerpiece of the album is the somewhat unfortunate “I’ll

Say Yes,” Altizer’s tribute to Cassie Bernall, a victim of the Columbine shootings in Littleton, Colorado. The song was written for evangelistic campaigns conducted by Dawson McAllister and, as such, is easily given to uses that capitalize on the teenager’s death in exploitative ways. The song itself, however, avoids the extravagance of **Michael W. Smith’s** “This is Your Time” by focusing more on Altizer’s own reaction to the news of Bernall’s confession than on the incident itself. As such, it offers a call for personal affirmation of faith in the face of evil (“I’ll say yes”).

On *Go Nova* Altizer embraces a retro sound that often puts him in the company of **Randy Stonehill** or **Terry Scott Taylor** (whose “I Love You # 19” he covers). “CM Superstar” is a sort of “Uncle Rand” (cf. Stonehill) sarcastic song that mocks banality in the Christian music industry. Altizer also offers his own version of “Gold Coast” and “Last Day of Summer,” which were covered by **Rebecca St. James** and **Skillet**, respectively, on Taylor’s *Surfonic Water Revival* album (KMG, 1998).

Altizer’s sometime producer and collaborator Adrian Belew has had an interesting career in his own right. He did not play with Robert Fripp on King Crimson’s classic albums of the ’60s and ’70s (e.g., *In the Court of the Crimson King*), but was guitarist in a new version of that band assembled by Fripp in the early ’80s. He also played guitar for David Bowie and then entered the Christian music scene as the producer responsible for twin masterpieces (“Liquid,” “Flood”) on **Jars of Clay’s** first album.

Christian radio hits: “How Many?” (# 16 in 1998); “I’ll Say Yes (She Said Yes)” (# 11 in 1999).

Jason Alvarez

1981—*Just Give Me Jesus* (Light).

Cuban refugee Jason Alvarez grew up on the streets of Newark, New Jersey, and became a recognized composer in the general market before releasing a Christian album in 1981. Alvarez and his mother fled war-torn Cuba with the help of the American Embassy in 1961 (just before the Bay of Pigs invasion). After a rough adolescence, his musical gifts allowed him to transcend the poverty of tenement-house living, and he went on to compose songs for such artists as The Duprees, Chuck Jackson, The Moments, and Charlie Rich. His huge hit came early with “Shame, Shame, Shame,” a Number One R&B song for Shirley and Co. in 1975, a song that would eventually sell three-and-a-half million records. Unfortunately, Alvarez had signed away all royalties to that tune in a bad contract negotiation. Alvarez was led to embrace Christianity in the early ’80s through the witness of his estranged wife, Gail. His album *Just Give Me Jesus* features original songs in both English and Spanish. The style is disco-inflected R&B with heavy Latin leanings. The album did not do well commercially, arriving

about two years too late for the disco phenomenon and about nineteen years too soon for the Latin invasion that would afford success to similar-sounding artists like Ricky Martin.

Maia Amada

1993—*Maia Amada* (DaySpring); 1994—*Faith Remains* (Intersound).

A classically trained singer of Spanish descent, Maia Amada from Scarsdale, New York, brings a powerful voice to R&B flavored songs written by her husband Alan Pugielli. Involved in music since childhood, she performed in a Broadway show (*The Me Nobody Knows*) at age fourteen and a year later toured as a singer in the Alan Pugielli Band, eventually marrying the bandleader. She dreamed of being a “big emotional singer” in the tradition of Sarah Vaughan, Shirley Bassey (her favorite), or Billie Holiday. In 1980, a religious experience caused her and her husband to put their lives “in God’s hands.” Amada’s two Christian albums feature a mix of upbeat, lively tunes and soulful ballads. *CCM* notes that her songs do not typically feature distinctive “Christian buzzwords” but celebrate love and other fruits of the spirit in ways that instill potential crossover general market appeal. The debut album scores with the adult dance numbers “There’s a Place” and “Soul Deep” (not a Box Tops cover).

Christian radio hits: “Love Never Fails” (# 15 in 1992); “Love Is for All” (# 1 for 3 weeks in 1993); “There’s a Place” (# 5 in 1993); “Second Chances” (# 9 in 1995); “Love’s the Key” (# 3 in 1995).

Amarachi (and Gail Moore)

Gail Moore, voc.; et al. As Amarachi: 1991—*Keep On Singin’: Gospel Reggae, Vol. 1*. As Gail Moore: date unknown—*Faithfully* (Moore Ministries).

www.mooreministries.com

Amarachi is noteworthy for being the first Christian band to release an album of reggae music, thus prefiguring the work of **Christafari** and **Temple Yard**. The group was founded in Nigeria as the outreach of the local Calvary Chapel church, pastored by Austen Ezenwa. It became a showcase for the vocal talents of Gail Moore, a former backup singer to Phil Collins who has also worked with Michael Jackson and **Donna Summer**. The name “Amarachi” means “grace of God” in a Nigerian dialect. *Keep on Singin’* includes reggae versions of **Bob Bennett’s** “You’re Welcome Here” and “Blessed Jesus.” There does not appear to have been a *Gospel Reggae, Vol. 2*, but Moore’s solo album is also a collection of Christian reggae songs. It includes a version of **Van Morrison’s** “Have I Told You Lately That I Love You.”

For trivia buffs: Gail Moore is married to Art Moore, former NFL tackle with the New England Patriots. Together, they founded Moore Ministries in 1979 to “reach the youth of America with the positive life-changing message of Christ.”

Amaziah

Paul Loader, bass; Dave Steel, kybrd.; Phil Williams, drums; Derek Elliot, voc. (–1979); Jez Strode, gtr. (–1979). 1979—*Straight Shooter* (Sonrise).

Amaziah was a hard rock British band featuring aggressive guitars and powerful synthesizers. Their album includes one power ballad (“All Is Peace”) and one song that features a more progressive “modern rock sound” (“Way, Truth, Life”). Otherwise, it is what *Jesus Music* magazine calls “homemade, heavy, monster rock.” That same publication calls Derek Elliott’s vocals “an acquired taste.” Amaziah’s songs feature blatantly Christian lyrics—as do those of most ’70s Christian rock bands. Their album was later remixed and reissued on red vinyl by a Canadian label (Tunesmith). This edition, which became much better known, features a new cover, containing a picture of the band—except that it *isn’t* the band. Elliott and Jez Strode had left. Dave Steel’s brother Kev stood in for the photo and everyone dressed up as punk-rockers—which they certainly were not. A copy of Amaziah’s album with its original cover can sell for up to \$1500.

Ambient Theology

Stefan Nelson; Greg Young. 1995—*Ambient Theology* (N’Soul).

Stefan Nelson and Greg Young, who also create techno music under the names **Bubblebaby**, Resolution, and **Virus**, produced one of the first albums of ambient music to gain much recognition in the Christian market. Adopting the name Ambient Theology, they crafted a concept piece dealing with creation and the interface of nature and spirit. The opening track, “Formless,” combines the sounds of bubbling water with eerie synthesizers to suggest a world that is indeed “without form and void.” Then the Spirit moves “Over the Face of the Deep.” Several pieces deal with virtues of forgiveness, sacrifice, “Hope,” and “Love.” Of course, all of these pieces are instrumentals, and the ambient sounds are at best suggestive. Accordingly, a devotional booklet accompanies the album (cf. **Tom Howard’s** *The Hidden Passage*), providing meditations for each piece. When one uses the album as suggested—as background music for reading this accompanying book—one discovers that all the devotions are related to the life and teaching of Christ. Thus, “Formless” turns out to be about humanity, not just the primordial earth, and what seemed at first suggestive of creation is reapplied to redemption. Such polyvalence is definitive of the ambient music genre.

American Made

Aaron Brown, drums; Chris Brown, gtr.; Danneal Castillo, voc.; Eric Keeler, bass. 1999—*Against the Flow* (KMG).

American Made attempts to combine punk and rap music in a unique and diverse way. “We’re probably the only rap/punk band ever to exist,” lead vocalist Danneal Castillo told *HM*. “The rest of the band grew up listening to bands like Rancid and the Ramones. . . . I grew up on L.L. Cool J.” Some critics would compare the band’s debut album to the rap songs of **DC Talk** or **Reality Check**. A closer comparison would actually be **The Huntingtons**, as the group’s punk drive tends to overshadow the pop and rap aspects. Strong cuts include the title track (a straightforward punk song) and their cover of The Corbins’ “Kick It,” which takes them into the ’90s party rock sound of Sugar Ray. “That Thing I Do” is not the **Rick** and **Linda Elias** song that served as the title track for the Tom Hanks movie (*That Thing You Do*), but it is almost as catchy and melodic. Another tune, “Nintendo,” exhibits the group’s penchant for carefree lyrics: “I was thinking just today . . . of all the fun and joy Nintendo’s given me . . . but Nintendo can’t set you free.” Critic Josh Spencer describes the band’s sound as teetering on the brink between “overproduced-commercial” and “gritty authentic.” *HM* magazine is less ambiguous: “It’s hard not to totally fall in love with this band.”

Among Thorns

Dave Childress, bass; Brandon Eller, drums; Matt Gilder, kybrd.; Jason Harrison, voc.; Gary Ishee, gtr.; Darin Sasser, gtr. 1999—*Among Thorns* (Worship Extreme); 2001—*Desperate* (Here to Him).

www.sirrealrecords.com

Billed as a “praise and worship band,” Among Thorns is composed of a group of young men from Texas who met at a college Bible study and began performing for church youth groups and then started working with evangelist Ken Freeman. They have been especially popular at programs sponsored by Baptist churches. The songs on their first album are almost all addressed to God, heartfelt appeals set to acoustic pop melodies. “Call To You” celebrates the ability to call upon God in any time of need; “Embrace This Place” communicates the security of finding closeness to God in an environment of serene worship. *Desperate* offers more original songs, all with the “intense youth group feel” of a Midwest version of **Delirious?** The opening “No Rock” is straightforward praise, with reference to Luke 19:40. “Lay It Down” is a powerful modern hymn of consecration. “Wind of God” celebrates and invokes the Spirit, and the title track is a song of adoration: “What a beautiful God you are / Nothing I have seen compares to you.”

Amplified Version

1975 Lineup: Michael Beaman, gtr.; Darryl Carter, kybrd.; Fred Llapitan, drums; Shirley Monroe, voc.; Carol Morgan, voc.; Paul Morgan, voc.; Billy Morgette, bass; Marty Powell, voc. Date unknown—*One in the Son*

(New World); *He's My Brother* (New Life); 1975—*Whatcha' Gonna Do?* (NewPax); 1979—*Alive* (Chrism).

This early Jesus movement band is remembered for its album *Whatcha Gonna Do?* which revealed their indebtedness to producer **Gary S. Paxton**. Their sound was distinctive in its use of brass (seven horns), recalling such early-'70s outfits as Chicago or Blood, Sweat, and Tears. Two Paxton songs received a lot of attention: "Jesus Is My Lawyer in Heaven" and "Jesus Keeps Takin' Me Higher and Higher." These and the title song constitute the album's high-energy numbers. Another Paxton song, "Gadget Man," is noteworthy for its complex and original structure. Rohn Bailey (kybrd.), **Bruce Hibbard** (voc., gtr.), Jorge Marsal (perc.), and Shirley Marsal (voc.) were also members of the group at some point.

Michael Anderson

1988—*Sound Alarm* (A&M); 1990—*Michael Anderson*; 1993—*Saints and Sinners* (ForeFront); 1996—*Love Is the Hard Part*.

www.michaelanderson.com

A prolific songwriter whose song "Promise Man" won the 1996 Dove award for Hard Rock Song of the Year for **Holy Soldier**, Michael Anderson is better associated in some circles with country and bluegrass music. Anderson's career has crossed boundaries between sacred and secular music as well. A Michigan native who moved to Los Angeles in 1977, Anderson was first signed as a rock singer to A&M, and the title track from his debut album for that label received considerable airplay on album-oriented stations (the lyrics were based on the prophetic oracle in Joel 2). Anderson also wrote "No Loving You" for John Fogerty and "Maybe It Was Memphis" for country singer Pam Tillis, which earned him a Song of the Year Award from the Country Music Association. At the same time, he was making his mark in Christian music, penning hits for artists as diverse as **Russ Taff** ("I Need You") and **Rhythm House**. In recent years, he has written or cowritten such Christian market hits as "Sticks and Stones" for **Code of Ethics** and "Go and Sin No More" for **Rebecca St. James**. He collaborated with **Michael Omartian** on his *The Race*, cowriting the hits "Faithful Forever" and "Let My Heart Be the First To Know."

Sound Alarm bewildered executives at A&M who weren't sure how to market a rock album with such high spiritual content. The eponymous follow-up, produced by Omartian, was more polished and less direct in its religious references, but did not do well commercially. Nevertheless, these first two records established Anderson as a singer who was impassioned about addressing life's problems from a perspective of faith. "Soweto Soul" looks at the tragedy of apartheid in South Africa, with one eye on the racial riots surrounding the Rodney King trial in Los Angeles. "I Think It's Time to Go Home" is a deeply per-

sonal statement about Anderson's reconciliation with his father after eighteen years of noncommunication. "I Know That You Can Stand" is a testimony to the power of faith to overcome fear and adversity.

Saints and Sinners was effectively Anderson's Christian market debut. The record pairs him with producer **Eddie DeGarmo** and showcases his soulful voice and acoustic guitar on country-inflected pop tunes. The Jordanaires provide background vocals, and **Ashley Cleveland** and **Bob Carlisle** also put in guest appearances. In several songs ("God's Been Good to Me," "I Keep Comin' Back to Jesus," "Man from Galilee") the gospel content is explicit. The album also includes a bluesy remake of "Sound Alarm" (with fiddle and dobro). The song "What You Gonna Do About Jesus?" features the provocative line, "He don't give a damn about your religion" (the *he* being Jesus).

The next album, *Love is the Hard Part*, defied expectations again as Anderson adopted a more Peter Gabriel-style eclecticism. He covers **Larry Norman's** "Shot Down," offers some acoustic pop ("I Know It's Not the Rain"), and then churns out some funky Memphis-soul numbers ("Soul Man Myself," "No Easy Way"). The title track seems to be equally inspired by 1 Corinthians 13 and John Lennon's "Love." It reflects poignantly on the difficulty of fulfilling every Christian's prime directive: "Love's a river, love's a fire / Love is every heart's desire / Love is knowing only time will tell / Love is heaven, love is hell."

Anderson sees himself as a songwriter first and a performer second. Although he seems to have found his niche in the contemporary Christian market, he maintains that he never sets out to write "Christian songs." Rather, his songs are Christian because he is a Christian and the songs come from within him. "I don't know how *not* to do it," he avers, while remaining critical of the Christian music industry when it attempts to devise standards for defining whether a song is adequately "Christian" or not.

For trivia buffs: Anderson is also the author of the Civil War novel *Shiloh*, and he wrote the corresponding screenplay, *Shiloh: A Confederate Love Story*.

Christian radio hits: "Saints and Sinners" (# 8 in 1993); "I Know It's Not the Rain" (# 8 in 1996).

Scott Anderson

1988—*Somebody Loves You* (Pan Trax); 1992—*Somethin' Different* (Mercy).

Scott Anderson is regularly described as bearing an uncanny resemblance to **Larry Norman** in both musical style and personality. Silly songs are mixed with gritty ones in a bluesy blend that does not take itself too seriously but points quickly to Jesus Christ as the answer to problems large and small. His album *Somethin' Different* features old-fashioned

folk-rock songs with titles like “Still Holding On to the Good News” and “Love Your Neighbor Kind of Stuff.” Anderson also presents a straightforward message reminiscent of songs from the Jesus movement revival two decades before. He sings “There’s a love I’ve found in Jesus” (“There’s a Love”) and suggests, “When you’re feeling down and out / Take your heart to heaven for a while” (“Take Your Heart to Heaven”).

Andrus, Blackwood, and Co.

Sherman Andrus, voc.; Terry Blackwood, voc., Bill Egtlin, kybrd., voc.; Rocky Laughlin, bass; Tim Marsh, drums; Bob Villareal, kybrd., voc.; Karen Voegtlin, voc. 1977—*Grand Opening* (Greentree); 1978—*Following You*; 1980—*Live*; 1981—*Soldiers of the Light*; 1982—*Step Out of the Night*; 1984—*Best of; Holiday* (Nissi).

The group (essentially duo) Andrus, Blackwood, and Co. was a spin-off from the highly successful vocal ensemble **The Imperials**, though both Andrus and Blackwood had musical pedigrees that preceded their involvement with that group. **Sherman Andrus** had been a founding member of **Andraé Crouch and the Disciples**. **Terry Blackwood** was the son of Doyle Blackwood, founder of one of the most successful gospel quartets of all time, the Blackwood Brothers. After bringing **The Imperials** to the attention of a younger audience, Andrus and Blackwood sought to find their own niche in the burgeoning contemporary Christian market. Andrus, Blackwood, and Co. was formed in 1977. The two were not songwriters, but their popular recordings helped to establish the careers of such composers as **Bruce Hibbard**, Hadley Hockensmith, Phil Johnson, and Tim Sheppard. Their music incorporated jazzy influences (“Step Out of the Night”) and even Alan Parsons-style synthesizers (“No You May Not”), with more traditional songs reflecting their southern gospel roots (“God-Made Man,” “The Other Side”). *Following You* is an ambitious two-record set with a gatefold cover and includes songs by Johnson and Sheppard, as well as by **Reba Rambo** and **Dony McGuire**. The *Live* album brings out some of the humor of the group’s shows, as when Andrus offers a tongue-in-cheek ’50s version of “Jesus You’re So Wonderful.” Andrus and Blackwood were a racially integrated duo (Andrus is black and Blackwood, white), a rarity in the music industry, religious or secular. At the height of their career, they dominated their genre in an unprecedented way. Indeed, in 1981, there were only nine weeks when the Number One song on Christian radio stations was *not* by Andrus, Blackwood, and Co. Both artists also pursued solo careers, as did background singer **Karen Voegtlin**.

Christian radio hits: “Following You” (# 10 in 1979); “You’re So Good to Me” (# 9 in 1979); “Jesus You’re So Wonderful” (# 1 for 20 weeks in 1981); “Soldier of the Light” (# 1 for 23 weeks in 1981); “Step Out of the Night” (# 1 in 1983); “Stone’s Throw Away” (# 7 in 1983); “No You May Not” (# 29 in 1983); “Amen Again” (# 8 in 1985).

Sherman Andrus

1974—*I’ve Got Confidence* (Impact); 1976—*Soon Coming* (Shalom); 1978—*How the Years Go By*; 1982—*Revisited* (Christian World); *Caution to the Wind* (Amethyst).

Sherman Andrus was a founding member of **Andraé Crouch and the Disciples** and then, from 1971 to 1976, helped to give **The Imperials** (mainstays of southern gospel) credibility with a new, younger audience. During the latter period he released his first solo album, featuring his take on Crouch’s “I’ve Got Confidence.” Andrus also performed with Terry Blackwood in **Andrus, Blackwood, and Co.** He was, with Crouch, one of the first black singers to break into the contemporary Christian market. He humorously recalls his mission as being “to boldly go where no black man had gone before.” Andrus attended Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He also lived in Los Angeles and Oklahoma City.

Angela

1998—*Heaven Knows Me* (Solace).

Angela Crimi is a Roman Catholic pop singer who recorded her first album under her first name only at age twenty-two, just four years after being miraculously delivered through a Catholic healing evangelist from what she calls “a sinful life.” At age eighteen, she was singing in her boyfriend’s rock band, taking drugs, and suffering from anorexia and bulimia. When the evangelist placed his hands on her head and prayed for her—against her will—she maintains that the power of God came into her and changed everything. Angela is somewhat distinctive in the contemporary Christian scene for her devotion to Roman Catholic piety. Alongside her witness to the redemptive power of Jesus, she speaks forthrightly (in Catholic settings at least) of her devotion to the rosary and adoration of Mary: “Our Lady really brought me closer to her Son, especially through the Eucharist and the Mass. I always ask her for advice. She’s our mother, why not go to her?” Angela cohosts a TV show called *Focus*, which uses popular music as a venue for talking about issues of importance to youth.

A different artist (an African American woman) named Angela recorded an album of Christian music called *Faithful and True* in 2000.

Angeldust

See **Circle of Dust**.

Angelica

Dennis Cameron, gtr.; Andy Lyon, voc. (– 1990) // Jerome Mazza, voc. (+ 1990, – 1991); Robert Pallen, bass (+ 1990); Drew Baca, voc. (+ 1991); Bobby Lawrence, drums (+ 1991). 1989—*Angelica* (Intense); 1990—

Walkin' in Faith; 1991—*Rock, Stock, and Barrel*; 1992—*Time Is All It Takes*; 1993—*Greatest Hits*; 1998—*Classic Archives* (KMG).

The hard rocking Christian band Angelica was basically a showcase for the guitar histrionics of Dennis Cameron from Renfrew, Ontario. The rhythm section was uncharacteristically subdued for hard rock, and the band went through three different singers. It was Cameron's guitar that attracted all the attention, prompting somewhat exaggerated comparisons to Eddie Van Halen. *HM* proclaimed the debut record "the sleeper metal album of the year" and called special attention to the song "Are You Satisfied?" which deals with the spiritual status of a fallen friend. "Shine on Me" is a stadium screamer from that album, and the opening track, "There's Only One Hero," a midtempo power-pop song similar to something *Petra* might have done. Guest vocals on the first project were provided by Rob Rock of *Joshua* (and later *Impellitteri*). *Walkin' in Faith* was a bit of a sophomore slump commercially, but includes the very Van Halen-ish "Time and Time Again." The song "Harvest" is an instrumental that shows off some of Cameron's hottest licks, and the title track is an escalating number that explodes into a Bon Jovi-like arena anthem after more than a minute of instrumental build-up. For their last two albums, Angelica featured vocals by Drew Baca that seemed uncharacteristically clean and smooth for metal (*HM* called them "candy-coated"). This gave the group a modicum of pop appeal that set them apart from some of their peers. *Rock, Stock, and Barrel* displays a more blues-influenced hard rock approach à la Aerosmith. "Cover Me," "Home Sweet Heaven," "Keep Pushing On," and "Rhyme and Reason" are highlights, and an affectionate instrumental cover of "Oh Canada" closes the project. *Time Is All It Takes* is best remembered for the standout song, "Don't Stop" (not a Fleetwood Mac cover); the tune begins with a picking-and-strumming introduction and builds into an anthem with a guitar solo midway through. Its lyrics draw from Jesus' parable about building a house on rock or sand (Matthew 7:24–27). "Open Your Mind" is a particularly stellar Van Halen clone and "Gotta Get Ready" is another Aerosmith-like track urging preparation for the apocalypse. "Second Chance" is an atypical power ballad, a format that (unlike many Christian metal bands) Angelica avoided running into the ground.

Angelo and Veronica

Angelo Petrucci, voc.; Veronica Petrucci, voc. 1992—*Higher Place* (Benson); 1993—*A & V*; 1995—*Give Your Life*; 1996—*Not Enough*; 1999—*Change* (Harmony).

The husband and wife duo of Angelo and Veronica deliver urban R&B-flavored gospel music of the sort usually associated with African American artists. Actually, Angelo is Italian and Veronica is Puerto Rican, and the ethnic confusion has caused problems over the years. The group complained to *CCM* in 1994

that some white churches wouldn't book them because they thought they were black, and that some black fans had rejected them when they learned that they weren't. The couple comes by its sound honestly, having been introduced to Christian music through *Commissioned's Fred Hammond*, who has sometimes served as their producer. Angelo's smooth tenor reminds many listeners of *BeBe Winans*, while Veronica's belting howls recall Chaka Kahn. The couple met at the Berklee School of Music in Boston, married in 1992, and moved to Nashville.

The first record staked out a claim in urban sounds with fierce club tunes like "I Know" and "I'll Be There." It garnered the duo a 1993 Dove nomination for Best New Artist. *A & V* moves more into the adult contemporary market, featuring an exceptional remake of Carole King's "You've Got a Friend." The hit song "No Doubt About It" was cowritten by Michael Bolton. *Give Your Life* (released internationally as *Da Tu Vida*) returns the group to the R&B fold, but with more of a Latin feel on some songs. "Emotional" is the hot track on that album, and "Miracles," the pop ballad with a nice sax solo. By *Not Enough*, critics had grown tired of the Petruccis' disco-for-the-'90's sound and began to complain that they needed to show some innovation. Benson let their contract run out, but after a three-year hiatus the group returned with *Change* on an independent label run by ordained minister Raina Bundy. This release was the less-programmed product critics had desired. Two songs ("I've Been Thinking," "Make Up Your Mind") introduce rap, while "Praise the Lord" evinces a fully Latin sound complete with Spanish lyrics. Angelo covers the *Fred Hammond* hit that had introduced him to Christian music years earlier ("Running Back to You"), and the duo revamps Bill Withers' "Just the Two of Us." Unfortunately, the album ends with a spoken-word altar call that detracts musically and gives the project a sectarian cast.

Angelo and Veronica enjoyed slight secular success when one of their songs, "I Love You More," was featured on the CBS soap opera *As the World Turns*. Nevertheless, they claim to be "ministers first and musicians second." The lyrics to their songs are often strongly evangelical, with an emphasis on praise and worship. Their concerts can take on the air of revival meetings, peppered with shouts (from the stage and from the audience) of "amen," "praise the Lord," and "thank you, Jesus."

Christian radio hits: "Knocking on Your Door" (# 4 in 1993); "I Know" (# 6 in 1993); "I'll Be There" (# 17 in 1993); "You Loved Me When" (# 18 in 1994); "No Doubt About It" (# 19 in 1994); "Emotional" (# 16 in 1995).

Dove Awards: 1995 Contemporary Gospel Song ("God Knows"); 1996 Urban Album (*Give Your Life*).

Angie and Debbie

See *Angie and Debbie Winans*.

Anguish Unsaid

Brian Faucett, gtr.; John Edwards, voc.; John Ross, gtr.; Justin Thomas, bass; Shannon Tuttle, drums // John Jensen, kybrd. (+ 2000). 1999—*Wanting . . . Waiting* (Bettie Rocket); 2000—*The Chronicles of the Restoration of the Church*.

Anguish Unsaid is a hardcore band from Sacramento, California, whose sound is described by guitarist Brian Faucett as “kind of like Fugazi meets Black Flag meets Keith Green in a fist-fight in an alley.” Their songs are notably more lengthy than those of many punk outfits and convey explicit gospel themes. The group has played a number of secular venues in spite of their evangelical orientation. “Most people can’t understand the words to hardcore anyway,” says lead singer and lyricist John Edwards, “but we talk in between songs.” The group also hands out lyric sheets at its shows, for those who are interested. The debut album *Wanting . . . Waiting* deals with the theme of yearning for Christ’s return. The sophomore project, *The Chronicles of the Restoration of the Church*, moves more in the direction of what *HM* would style as art-rock. Both albums feature songs with titles that seem to advertise theological treatises: “Confession in Times of Tribulation” from the first and “Key Factors the Devil Overlooked” from the second. The band says they took their name from the reluctance of people to talk about Christ’s anguish on the cross: “people want to portray him always smiling or like he just took a shower, but nothing really portrays what took place.”

Annie

Joel Bordeaux, kybrd., trump.; Patrick McNeely, bass; David Morton, drums; Stephen Nichols, voc., gtr.; Jeff Wickes, gtr. 1999—*Sci-fi Canon Blue(s)* (BulletProof).

With a sound reminiscent of Radiohead, psychedelic pop band Annie debuted with an album that met with universal raves from the alternative Christian music press. The quintet from Cleveland, Tennessee, presents eight songs laden with Beatles-style harmonies, ethereal guitar arrangements, and appropriate helpings of piano, trumpet, and strings. “Artsy but not pretentious,” *The Lighthouse* said. The song “Shoot First, Leap Second” is bouncy light-hearted pop, while “Censer Silence” features more melodramatic crooning and existentialist lyrics (“When all things pass away / We will still remain / Through the supple lift of enormity”). “The Ice Storm” features Jeff Wickes’s guitar and more accessible poetry redolent with Christmas imagery: “Late one night in a Middle East explosion / An eternal notion to save the world / To redeem the spirit of forgiving / The reason we are living has been unfurled.”

While the members of the group are Christians and their songs have spiritual themes, they have resisted identification with the Christian market, claiming to have signed with the Christian label BulletProof only as a last resort. “There’s so

much in the Christian market that’s belittling, I think, to the musicians, and quite frankly to God and Jesus Christ,” says guitarist Wickes. “I think that the Christian market is based around taking a half-ass song, putting the right words on it, and selling a million copies . . . hence, a band like **DC Talk** that’s really not all that good are millionaires.”

Anointed

Steve Crawford, voc.; Da’dra Crawford Greathouse, voc.; Nee-C Walls, voc. (– 2001); Mary Tiller, voc. (– 1995). 1993—*Spiritual Love Affair* (Word); 1995—*The Call* (Myrrh); 1996—*Under the Influence*; 1999—*Anointed*; 2001—*If We Pray*.

The African American vocal group known as Anointed hails from Columbus, Ohio, where they formed in 1988 and were later discovered by producer Gene Eugene (of **Adam Again**). In 1992, they backed **Vickie Winans** on her album *The Lady*. The band combines hard-driving urban contemporary dance music with smooth-flowing ballads, most of which are written by the group members themselves. Steve Crawford and Da’dra Crawford Greathouse are siblings. The group began as a quartet with an unusual gender balance (one man, three women) and continued as a trio when Tiller dropped out, alleging sexual harassment on the part of Anointed’s manager and suing the group for breach of contract related to their reluctance to fire that person (the other members of Anointed maintain that Tiller did not inform them fully of the problems and that the conflict had appeared to them to be a personal issue). By 2001, Anointed had shrunk to a sibling duo.

The debut album, *Spiritual Love Affair*, won Anointed an audience among fans of upbeat R&B and earned the group a Stellar award for Best New Artist. “God’s Personality” opens the album with a swingbeat sound. “The Other Side” is a particularly funky number, with aural allusions to Mary J. Blige. The title track is an adult contemporary ballad disguising a worship song with double entendres that allow it to be heard as a paean to romantic bliss. With *The Call*, Anointed turned down the volume to the disappointment of some, and dug deeper theologically, to the delight of others. The album does feature the jazzy house-party song, “If I Labor,” but also includes “Send Out a Prayer,” which recalls the acoustic folk songs of Tracy Chapman. Its standout cut is “It’s in God’s Hands Now,” which *CCM* magazine describes as “a painful confessional about letting go of a spouse who doesn’t want to stay in a relationship.” By dealing so effectively with a topic (divorce) that affects many Christians but is rarely mentioned in Christian music, Anointed scored points for daring and sensitivity. The song also enjoyed some mainstream success, charting on *Billboard*’s Top 40 R&B list. The next album, *Under the Influence*, continues the group’s journey from urban to pop. “Waiting in the Wings” was compared to Christopher Cross’s “Sailing” on

account of its backdrop of waterfall guitars. The title track (“Under the Influence”) opens and closes the album with diverse acoustic and upbeat mixes. It employs the strained but biblical (Acts 2:13; Ephesians 5:18) metaphor of drunkenness to describe life in the Spirit. Other tracks include “Get Ready,” a funky/bluesy call to prepare for the Lord’s return, and a beautiful, soulful rendition of “Take Me Back.” The self-titled fourth album does take the group back to the more urban sound with which they began. Their vocals are backed with more contemporary electronic sounds. The appropriately rousing “Revive Us” received immediate attention, though greater depth can be found in “Something Was Missing” and “Love by Grace,” songs that deal with life’s disappointments. “Head above Water” and “It’s All Good” offer encouragement to the frustrated and perplexed. *If We Pray* is a concept album focusing on the theme of daily prayer, which is encouraged in the Latin-pop of its opening title track. “Nothing Can Stop You from Loving Me” is a funky party song celebrating God’s amazing grace. “Rejoice” and “One Fine Day” (not the Carole King song) are also strong upbeat numbers. The album’s clear standout is “Things I Wish,” a soulful ballad by **Tommy Sims** that showcases Steve Crawford’s buttery vocals. The intended radio hit, “You’ll Never Thirst,” is a typical adult contemporary ballad with strong lyrics inspired by the story of Jesus and the woman at the well (John 4).

The members of Anointed all came from single-parent households and, when the group first recorded, ranged in age from nineteen to twenty-three. As such, they considered it part of their ministry to set positive role models for young people, especially young urban blacks. Notably, they all pursued college educations while recording, proclaiming a “stay in school” message alongside their more evangelistic exhortations. They have also striven to overcome racial barriers in Christian music, however, telling *CCM* in 1999 that they try to bring three diverse audiences together: young, conservative whites who like Christian pop; young, liberal African Americans who like urban music; and older, moderate African Americans who like gospel.

Christian radio hits: “God’s Personality” (# 23 in 1993); “Send Out a Prayer” (# 2 in 1995); “The Call” (# 8 in 1995); “Under the Influence” (# 3 in 1996); “Waiting in the Wings” (# 2 in 1997); “Adore You” (# 3 in 1997); “Revive Us” (# 5 in 1999); “Godspot” (# 16 in 1999).

Dove Awards: 1996 Contemporary Gospel Album (*The Call*); 1996 Contemporary Gospel Song (“The Call”); 1996 Urban Song (“It’s in God’s Hands Now”); 1997 Urban Song (“Under the Influence”); 2000 Contemporary Gospel Album (*Anointed*); 2000 Urban Song (“Anything Is Possible”).

Antestor

Armoth, drums; Gard, bass; Martyr, voc.; Vermod, gr., kybrd. 1997—*The Return of the Black Death* (Cacophonous); 2000—*Martyrium* (SWE).

Antestor is a death- or black-metal band from Norway. Their sound is ominous and brooding, though the group testifies to their faith with unambiguous lyrics. The albums listed above were recorded in the opposite order of their release. *Martyrium* was actually recorded in 1994 and three of the songs were featured on a metal compilation album called *Northern Lights* (Rowe), but the full project’s release was held up by legal complications. The song “Have Mercy” is based on Psalm 51. The group underwent a change of style for their second recording (*The Return of the Black Death*), slowing down the usually super-rapid pace and adding more atmospheric keyboards. They coined the term “sorrow metal” to describe what they took to be their own distinctive genre. Notably, the label on which *Return of the Black Death* was released (Cacophonous) is one especially known for artists associated with occult and overtly satanic music. That company’s official press release for Antestor indicates that “lyrically, the band steers away from the well-worn paths of occultism and violence, concentrating more on . . . death and what happens hereafter.” The song “Bridge of Death” proclaims, “Satan says he’ll set me free, but he’s a loser just like me.” “Battlefield” exhorts, “Rejoice in the Lord, for him we’ll fight.” A song titled “Depressed” quotes directly from Psalm 51: “Create in me a clean heart O God / Give me a new and steadfast spirit / Do not drive me from thy presence.” The most powerful song on the album, “A Sovereign Fortress,” is based on Psalm 46 (as is Martin Luther’s “A Mighty Fortress is Our God”). *Martyrium* is entirely in English, but the lyrics to some of the songs on *Return of the Black Death* are in Norwegian.

Antidote

Jorge Goyco, electronics; Leigh Goyco, voc. 1998—*What Mountain?* (N’Soul); 1999—*Fight or Flight*; 2000—*Forget Yourself*.

Antidote offers the following self-description of their sound: “electronic dance trip-hop funky acid trance.” *The Lighthouse* just describes it as “experimental and out there.” The husband and wife duo from Austin, Texas, present instrumental and vocal tracks directed to the rave scene of club dancers. The instrumentals tend to recall such general market artists as Tricky, Crystal Method, or Prodigy, while the vocal numbers are more reminiscent of Björk or Portishead. The third album exhibits a more focused sound than is evident on the first two. On all of the records, however, the lyrics on the vocal numbers are blatantly religious. The song “Love” from the first album is almost an instrumental, but with an electronic voice repeating the words “God is love” over and over again. “Everywhere I Go” from *Forget Yourself* is about taking a Bible wherever one goes. Another recurrent theme is renunciation of belief in alien life forms. Jorge Goyco thinks the “aliens” involved in so-called extra-terrestrial sightings (or abductions) are actually demonic

manifestations sent to trick humans into believing that they are not a special creation of God. He further says the mission of Antidote is twofold: “One part is to tell unsaved ravers that God loves them . . . second is to encourage Christians into a deeper relationship with God.” Then he adds what could be a third purpose, “to supply sanctified dance music for God’s people.”

Any Given Day

Personnel varies (see below). 1999—*Passionate Worship for the Soul* (BEC); 2001—*Earth to Heaven*.

Any Given Day is not exactly a group but a marketing label employed in a confusing and potentially deceptive manner. At first, BEC announced the formation of a new “praise and worship band” called Any Given Day, formed by two members of **The Supertones** (Jason Carson, drums; Tony Terusa, bass). The pair linked up with worship leader Andrew Bray and recorded a debut album of praise songs similar to what were traditionally featured in the worship segments of concerts by the Christian ska band. The debut album, *Passionate Worship for the Soul*, presents songs performed in a style popular with many collegiate Bible study/prayer groups. The sound, in other words, is *not* ska as **The Supertones** connection might have suggested (cf. the *Skalleluia* praise albums by **The Insyderz**), but, rather, features heartfelt singing to a basic guitar and piano accompaniment. Emphasis in song selection is on modern classics like “Lord, I Lift Your Name on High” and “I Stand in Awe.” Any Given Day was featured as “a new artist” in various Christian publications and gave interviews in which they presented themselves as such. The second Any Given Day album (*Earth to Heaven*), however, was not by the group that had previously been called Any Given Day but was by a completely different band—in fact it was by the novice Christian group **Cadet**. A credible project on its own terms, its merits were spoiled by this apparent marketing attempt to trick fans of the defunct Any Given Day into buying an album by **Cadet** without knowing it. Even *CCM*’s Brian Quincy Newcomb (Christian rock’s best critic) fell for the ploy and reviewed the album unknowingly as a second effort from **The Supertones**-spin-off band. Artist representation explained that BEC had decided to use “Any Given Day” as a logo for a series of worship albums, all of which would be by different groups. For information on the *Earth to Heaven* album, see the listing for **Cadet**.

A-1 Swift

Alisha Tyler, voc.; Christ Tyler, voc. 1994—*Turn Yourself Around* (Gospo-Centric); 1996—*Tales from the Swift*.

The husband and wife team of A-1 Swift is a male-female rap duo (a rarity even in the general market) that seeks to min-

ister to young people attracted to hard-edged gangsta rap. Chris Tyler was previously in a vocal/dance troupe called Cold Premiere (featured as rappers in the Kid and Play movie, *Class Act*). He converted his wife Alisha from the Catholicism in which she was raised (but from which she had strayed in any case) to a form of Christianity oriented toward a more individualistic understanding of salvation. Together, the two of them now express the message of this personal salvation through music that, according to Chris, sounds “like Ice Cube or A Tribe Called Quest.” The group also seeks to address social issues, “such as guns, violence, and the image of being a gangster or drug dealer.” The duo originally chose their name just because they liked the sound (inspired by a bottle of steak sauce) but they later decided that “Swift” could be an acronym for “Salvation Will Indeed Feel Terrific.”

Apocalypse

Kirk Miller, voc.; Jamerson Smith, voc. 1991—*Holiness or Hell* (Frontline).

The members of the African American rap duo Apocalypse go by the stage names “Notorious K” and “Al Capone of the Microphone.” *True Tunes* likens their style to Public Enemy, calling it “big time hard street rap.” Apocalypse favors intense, confrontational lyrics that challenge Christians to be strong in their faith and to get tough with the devil and his allies. “Apocalypse Hot Mix” deals with racial strife through a message addressed primarily to black Americans, denouncing prejudice (against whites) disguised as black pride and lamenting, “because of slavery, servanthood is embarrassing.” In “Crucifix,” the group calls on the listener to “get your blessed assurance up off the church pew” and get involved in society.

Apologetix

J. John Jackson, voc., gtr.; Karl Messner, gtr. // Stan Haynie, bass (+ 1995); Fred Behenna, drums (+ 1999). 1994—*Radical History Tour* (independent); 1997—*Ticked!*; 1998—*Jesus Christ Morningstar*; 1999—*Biblical Graffiti*.

www.apologetix.com

Most Christian bands resent being regarded as the Christian counterpart to some artist in the general market, but Apologetix boldly announces that they are “a Christian version of Weird Al Yankovic.” They put somewhat goofy biblical or inspirational lyrics to well-known rock songs. For instance, the Beatles’ “Twist and Shout” becomes “Twins Came Out” (the story of Jacob and Esau); the Hollies’ “Long Cool Woman in a Black Dress” turns into “Lawful Woman in a Bad Place” (the story of Rahab); the Beach Boys’ “Fun, Fun, Fun” is now “John 1:1”; Aerosmith’s “Walk This Way” becomes “Walk His Way.” The first album applied such shenanigans to twenty rock classics like “Bohemian Rhapsody,” “Maggie May,” and “Cat Scratch Fever.” The next took on twenty-two more, now

including alternative/grunge hits like “No Apologies,” “Lump,” and “You Oughta Know.” *Jesus Christ Morningstar* returned to the classics with eighteen parodies of songs like “Lucy in the Sky,” “Pinball Wizard,” and “American Pie.” *Biblical Graffiti* mixed genres, lampooning the Monkees (“Pleasant Valley Sunday”), Smash Mouth (“Walking on the Sun”), and Metallica (“Enter Sandman”).

The name Apologetix derives from a creative spelling of apologetics, the science of explaining or defending the truth of Christianity to skeptics (1 Peter 3:15). The seriousness of the name belies any notion that the group’s parodies are all meant to be humorous. Apologetix mixes the silly with the serious. For instance, their remake of Beck’s “Loser” as a worship song (“I want you to save me, so why don’t you fill me?”) aims to be inspiring, not funny. The band is a popular act on the Bible college circuit and repeatedly earns marks for their dead-on musical imitations of diverse pop genres. They recently received the endorsement of Weird Al’s drummer, Jon “Bermuda” Schwarz, who sat in for seven tracks on *Biblical Graffiti*. Schwarz said, “Your material is quite good, and the message is . . . accessible . . . not every track is a sermon—a lot of listeners will appreciate that.”

Apoptygma Berserk

Personnel list unavailable. 1993—*Soli Deo Gloria* (Tatra); 1996—7; 1998—*The Apocalyptic Manifesto* (Metropolis); 2000—*Welcome to Earth*.

Very little information is available about Apoptygma Berserk—from their label or anywhere else. The group is apparently a Norwegian trio that has been making Christian electronic music since 1989. Male vocals are provided by a Stephen Grothesk. The music is described as a blend of a driving, quick-pulse style of electronic music and more traditional synthpop. *Soli Deo Gloria* (i.e., “to God alone be glory”) was their first full-length release, and the album 7 is generally regarded as the group’s best work. It includes two songs that were successful club hits in Europe (“Non-Stop Violence,” “Deep Red”) and was re-released for American audiences on Metropolis in 1998. The *Manifesto* album on Metropolis is a collection of singles from the group’s nine-year European career. *Welcome to Earth* is permeated with a futuristic sci-fi vibe and includes a cover of Metallica’s “Fade to Black.” Apoptygma Berserk’s lyrics are often sparse and vague, making explicit Christian content less accessible than in, say, the dance music of **Scott Blackwell** or **Disco Saints**. The album 7 includes a song on which sampled voices describe Christ as a rebel for breaking with tradition (“Rebel”). *Soli Deo Gloria* and *Manifesto* both include a song called “Burning Heretic” about Christian persecution of other Christians (e.g., the Inquisition). Both of those albums also contain a song with the offensive title “Bitch” about broken relationships.

Applehead

Greg Minier, voc., gtr., bass, drums, kybrd. 1993—*Meaning* (Ocean).
www.crucifyd.com

Applehead is a solo project by **Greg Minier** of the hybrid-hardcore band **The Crucified**. On this side project, Minier goes for a basic Nirvana-grunge sound. The title track has a slow, ethereal ’60s feel, and “Intermittent You” recalls elements of The Stone Roses. “Monkey on My Back” is the most energetic number. More interesting lyrically are “Six Feet Under,” which reflects on death, and “Crutch,” which accepts the accusation that Christians rely on Christ as a crutch, admitting that they (and all people) are crippled without him.

Applesed Cast

Christopher Crisci, voc., gtr.; Aaron Pillar, gtr., voc.; Louie Ruiz, drums (– 2001); Jason Wickersheim, bass (– 2001) // Josh Baruth, drums (+ 2001); Marc Young, bass (+ 2001). 1998—*The End of the Ring Wars* (Deep Elm); 2000—*Mare Vitalis*; 2001—*Low Level Owl, Vol. 1*; *Low Level Owl, Vol. 2*.
www.theapplesedcast.com

Although they maintain they are “not a Christian band,” Applesed Cast from Lawrence, Kansas, has a following among Christian music fans who have sometimes thought of them as a Christian band nonetheless. Lead singer Christopher Crisci explains how he believes the “misconception” got started: “I’m a Christian and I have a few friends who are in Christian bands and we have done a few things with them.” The band played the *Cornerstone* festival in 1998 and 1999 and has toured with other Christian artists, playing for primarily Christian audiences. A number of Christian music magazines (*HM*, *Cornerstone*, *True Tunes*) have profiled the band and run reviews of its albums. By 2001, however, the situation had changed and the group was distancing itself from the Christian music subculture.

Musically, Applesed Cast plays what is called post-hardcore emo music. *Pillowfight* says “Applesed Cast is all about feeling.” *Bandoppler* describes their sound as “the shimmering tears of honest men.” *Phantom Tollbooth* notes their potential for appeal to “the wounded of heart (or the chronically whiny, depending on your perspective).” The first album does not appear to draw from Tolkien’s tales, as its title might suggest, but traces the story of a broken relationship (probably a marriage, given the titular “ring”) and the consequent struggle to overcome lingering sorrow. The sound is often layered and unpredictable: “Portrait” features loud, driving feedback and discord; “Stars” introduces piano and a mellow saxophone. The second record, *Mare Vitalis* (Latin for “living sea”), was viewed as a major step forward, as a rare album that truly sounds unique. After a dark, brooding prelude, the sound suddenly takes flight

with a stunning number called “Fishing the Sky.” The finale to the album, “Storms,” has also drawn special acclaim for its surprising beauty. Appleseed Cast also placed three songs on a special split-artist CD released by Deep Elm in 1999 (featuring their work and that of two other bands, Planes Mistaken for Stars and Race Car Riot). One of these, “Tale of the Aftermath,” is apparently intended as an epilogue to the saga of *The Ring Wars*. In 2001, the group issued a two-volume twenty-six-song work, *Low Level Owl*. Volume One of this project begins with several songs reminiscent of the *Mare Vitalis* material (a tad too reminiscent for some critics) but then shifts into what *HM* would call a more “earthy” sound midway through. That same magazine describes *Volume 2* as continuing that “aesthetic revolution” with songs that “shiver your bones with probing melodies, wet whispers, itchy bridges, and misty harmonies.” About half the tracks on each *Owl* volume are instrumental.

There is little in the lyrics to Appleseed Cast’s songs to suggest specific connections to Christianity, but Christian fans do claim to find spiritual enlightenment and inspiration in the band’s songs. Crisci says, “We write music that reflects how we feel, and sometimes that has something spiritual in it. I am happy that people can make that connection and that it means something to them. That’s the way it should be.” Still, the band certainly does not offer the sort of solutions to life’s problems that are sometimes expected from Christian artists. “Remedios the Beautiful,” from the split-artist CD, closes out that album with pretty guitars and soft voices singing, “Pain by the pound / I want to help you / But I don’t know how.”

In 2001, Crisci would tell *HM* magazine that he was the “only remaining Christian in the group” (Aaron Pillar is Jewish), and although they enjoyed the fanbase among the Christian culture, they did not think there was any integrity in trying to maintain that sort of connection. Specifically, he said the group had decided not to play *Cornerstone* any more, nor to support the festival. “I have really mixed feelings about *Cornerstone*,” Crisci said. “It has the best and worst of Christianity. The best is the display of faith and community and access to a lot of music and artists, but at the same time there’s that greed system at work . . . all these CDs, shirts, hats, visors, posters, jewelry, all with Christ’s name or image being sold for profit. It’s the ‘Brood of Vipers’ thing.”

Other purveyors of emo popular among Christian music fans include **Dear Ephesus**, Mineral, **Pedro the Lion**, and **Sunny Day Real Estate**.

Apt. Core

Will Hunt; et al. 2001—*Rhythms of Remembrance* (Rocketown).

Producer Will Hunt put together a project he called Apt. Core that *CCM* would designate “one of the most left-field re-

cordings to come out of Christian music.” *HM* described it as “a techno-influenced project that bursts out of Nashville like a bad boy out of the penalty box.” Basically, Hunt weds Scripture recitation (both spoken and sung) to ambient, electronic music. The sound of *Rhythms of Remembrance* is often tame, but sometimes bursts into Chemical Brothers-inspired industrial music. The record’s opening track, “Creed,” features pulsating percussion and a Middle-Eastern-sitar backed reading of the Apostles’ Creed. “The Way” focuses on John 14:6, sung by a melodic chorus. A version of **U2**’s “40” is included as the album’s only accessible, melodic track. **Ginny Owens** and other singers contribute vocals on the album.

Christian radio hits: “40” [with **Ginny Owens**] (# 18 in 2001).

AP2

Buka; Level. 2000—*Suspension of Disbelief* (Tooth and Nail).

The figures in AP2’s name stand for “Argyle Park Two.” The group considers itself to be “the next generation” of the seminal Christian industrial band **Argyle Park**, whose story should perhaps be read prior to this one. In this version, **Level** (i.e., Dan Levler, who released a solo album in 1998) replaces Klay Scott (a.k.a. Scott Albert). The new album continues in the vein of the first by bringing together diverse sounds. Although the basic core is industrial rock, heavy influences of techno music and thrash metal are stirred into the mix, along with surprising moments of tribal chants and meditative acoustic guitars. The appeal of such amalgamation is heightened once more by the appearance of numerous guest stars, including vocals by Joel Bell of **Ghoti Hook**, Daren Diolosa of **Klank** and **Circle of Dust**, and Mark Salomon of **Stavesacre** and **The Crucified**. Scott returns to offer guest vocals on “Resurrection of the Ravens,” and he produces two tracks that he also cowrote. The songs on *Suspension of Disbelief* continue in the angry spirit of those that made **Argyle Park** infamous, but this time the bitterness is directed against social injustices and worldly evils (“Heroin Hate”) rather than against the bandmate’s personal enemies.

Arcade

See **Heather and Kirsten**.

Iain Archer

1994—*Playing Dead* (Sticky Music); 1996—*Crazy Bird*; 1997—*Revelation Bell*; 2001—*For What Feels Like Forever*.

A folk-influenced singer/songwriter from Belfast, Iain Archer is often described as an Irish version of **Bruce Cockburn**. The singer is noted for his laid-back performances at Christian festivals where he chats casually with his audience between

songs. Bill Mallonee of the **Vigilantes of Love** once said of his voice, “When that man *talks*, it’s musical!” Archer’s first album contains the single “Wishing,” which has been described as “infuriatingly memorable,” and the ballad “Papa Burns,” which describes a chance meeting between two old school friends. *Crazy Bird* features Archer with no backing band. Accompanied by a lone guitar, he sings songs of love, loneliness, and quiet faith. The title track has a Celtic melody and has become a favorite of Archer’s fans. *Revelation Bell* is a short album of seven songs with a darker, more electric tone. The lyrics, too, tend to be imaginative and impenetrable, somewhat confusing for his traditional audience. *For What Feels Like Forever* is an EP of just four songs, mixing acoustic and electric genres in a brew that reminds some reviewers of Neil Young. It includes “Mirrorball Moon,” which *Phantom Tollbooth* called “Archer’s best song to date.”

Steve Archer

1982—*Solo* (Home Sweet Home); 1984—*Through His Eyes of Love* (Myrrh); 1985—*Action* (Home Sweet Home); 1987—*Off the Page*; 1988—*Steve Archer Hits*; 1994—*Christian Contemporary Classics with Steve Archer* (Diadem); 1998—*Stay Right Here* (Kle-Toi).

Californian Steve Archer (b. 1954) began singing professionally at the age of nine, and by nineteen was recording with the family group **The Archers**. After a decade with the family, he decided to apply his familiar voice to solo material, producing a debut album of adult contemporary, inspirational tunes. His second album (which includes an unpredictable rendition of **Mark Heard**’s “Eye of the Storm”) rose to Number One on contemporary Christian Music charts. In 1985, he remade one of the songs from that album as a duet with **Marilyn McCoo** of Fifth Dimension fame. The resulting single, “Safe,” was to be Archer’s biggest adult contemporary hit, drawing attention to his third album *Action*. His next album, *Off the Page*, includes a cover of the Staples Singers’ “If You’re Ready (Come Go with Me)” as well as the funky “Jump” (with sizzling saxophone) and the toe-tapping opener, “S.O.S.” Twelve years later, *Stay Right Here* would continue the formula of combining such bouncy tracks with worshipful blue-eyed soul ballads. By then, a reviewer for *The Lighthouse* couldn’t decide “whether Archer has a retro feel or just sounds dated.” At any rate, the music continues to appeal to those who like the sound of Hall and Oates or Mike and the Mechanics. Steve Archer was divorced in 1981 (just before his first solo album appeared) and then again in 1991. Those break-ups, however, did not bring upon him the sort of disdain that has sometimes come to Christian artists whose marriages fail.

Christian radio hits: “But You Didn’t” (# 9 in 1982); “Treasure” (# 13 in 1983); “Through His Eyes of Love” (# 15 in 1984).

The Archers

Steve Archer, voc.; Tim Archer, voc.; Nancy Short, voc. (–1976) // Janice Archer, voc. (+ 1976). 1971—*Put On Jesus* (Charisma); 1972—*Any Day Now*; 1972—*Life in Jesus* (Benson); 1973—*The Archers* [= reissue of *Any Day Now*] (Impact); 1974—*Keep Singin’ That Love Song* (Benson); 1974—*The Archers’ Golden Classics* (Light); 1975—*Things We Feel Deeply*; 1975—*In the Beginning*; 1977—*Fresh Surrender*; 1978—*Stand Up*; 1979—*Celebrate* (Live); 1981—*Spreadin’ Like Wildfire* (Songbird); 1982—*The Archers at Their Very Best* (Light); 1984—*All Systems Are Go*; *Golden Classics*; 1991—*Colors of Your Love* (Reunion); *Second Time Around*.

A northern California singing family with roots deep in the Jesus movement, The Archers produced stellar albums of MOR pop and launched the solo career of **Steve Archer**. Just like Donny Osmond and Michael Jackson, Steve began singing with his brothers (Tim, Gary, and Ron) when he was only nine (in 1965). Gary and Ron both went on to be pastors (in California and the Netherlands, respectively), and in 1969, the duo of Tim and Steve took second place in a national competition. For six more years they continued to perform as The Archer Brothers before deciding to add a female vocalist, amend their name, and begin a recording career as the trio listed above. They would go on to produce several Number One songs on Christian radio (before charts were published), including “Jesus Is the Answer” (written by **Andraé Crouch**). In 1972, they sang before 250,000 enthusiastic Jesus people at *Explo ’72* (dubbed “the Christian Woodstock” by *Life* magazine). In 1979, The Archers were invited to the White House to play for the Carters. In 1980, they won a Grammy Award for their contribution to *The Lord’s Prayer* (Light), a musical by **Reba Rambo** and **Dony McGuire**. The Archers’ sound featured tight, blended harmonies with members trading leads—similar to ’70s-era **The Imperials**, but with the addition of female vocals. They won praise from *Billboard* magazine, which once wrote, “The Archers have too much going for them to miss.” Rock guitarist Billy Masters played with The Archers from 1971 to 1976 and wrote some of their songs. The group also helped to launch the career of keyboard player Phil Kristianson, who went on to play for **Amy Grant**’s band and then to work as a band leader for Promise Keepers. Sister Janice (who officially joined when she finished high school, but had toured and sung with the group earlier) eventually married John Cruse of **The Cruse Family**. The Archers took a hiatus from recording in the mid ’80s but returned in 1991 with *The Colors of Your Love*. The song “Be Our Guest” from that album is an invitation for the Holy Spirit to dwell in the lives of believers. Both *The Colors of Your Love* and its follow-up (*Second Time Around*) reveal a group striving to stay up-to-date with harder edged sounds, synthesizers, and more soulful vocals. Christian musician **Erick Nelson** has summarized The Archers’ role in the development of contemporary Christian music as representing one-

half of a convergence: traditional vocal groups like The Archers got hipper while the hippie rock groups (like the Maranatha bands) got more mellow—eventually both evinced the polished, commercial sound that would be identified as stereotypical contemporary Christian music.

Christian radio hits: “Fresh Surrender” (# 7 in 1978); “Pickin’ Up the Pieces” (# 11 in 1979); “Stand Up” (# 9 in 1980); “Spreadin’ Like Wild-fire” (# 10 in 1982); “Heaven in Your Eyes” (# 2 in 1985); “Be Our Guest” (# 19 in 1991).

Carolyn Arends

1995—*I Can Hear You* (Reunion); 1997—*Feel Free*; 1999—*This Much I Understand*; 2000—*Seize the Day and Other Stories*.

www.carolynarends.com

A native of Vancouver, British Columbia, Carolyn Arends (b. 1968) has charted two general market Top 10 hits in her homeland (“This Is the Stuff,” “I Can Hear You”). In the United States, she was pigeon-holed early as a Christian singer but within that more limited market racked up enough songs to fill a greatest hits package after only five years of recording. Arends composes most of her own songs and, in fact, was first signed to her label as a staff songwriter. Before recording her own material, she penned the Dove award-winning “Love Will” for **Michael James Murphy**, as well as other songs for **4 Him**, **Susan Ashton**, **Lisa Beville** (“Place in the Sun”) and **Kim Boyce**. As a performer, she has progressed stylistically with each of her albums, as though trying out different persona. On *I Can Hear You*, she comes across as a modern (up-beat) folk singer in the tradition of Shawn Colvin or Suzanne Vega. On *Feel Free*, she fronts a country-rock band and the comparisons shift to Bonnie Raitt. Finally, she moves to something “in between,” to cite the title of a standout song on her third album. The best mainstream comparison for her full body of work might be to Sheryl Crow, who has also performed convincingly in a number of styles.

The song “Seize the Day” from Arends’ first record relates successive stories of individuals who do or don’t make the most of the time God has given them. The title track from that album, “I Can Hear You,” is addressed to God, expressing Arends’ recognition of the divine presence in everyday sounds (church bells, birdsong, laughter). She has identified the writings of Frederick Buechner as influential in shaping these thoughts. “This is the Stuff” offers the commonsense observation that the essence of life is found in everyday moments: “The smallest moments / This is the stuff I need to notice.” The album’s softest moment comes with “Reaching,” a tender ballad of yearning and searching. “Altar of Ego” is a confessional song of commitment to the principle of self-denial. “Love Is Always There” is one of the most straightforward

evangelical numbers, proclaiming the abiding and constant presence of God’s love. “The Power of Love” is not a Huey Lewis (or a **T Bone Burnett**) cover, but a song that cleverly contrasts the phenomenon named in its overused title with an even-more popular “love of power.”

Feel Free kicks off with the Beatlesque “Do What You Do,” which Arends maintains was inspired by the Dr. Seuss book *Oh, the Places You’ll Go*. The album then moves on to “New Year’s Day.” This is not the **U2** song (though Arends did include a slow, passionate cover of that group’s “Where the Streets Have No Name” in her tour to support the album), but an original composition focusing humorously on the failure of resolutions (“I buy a lot of diaries / Fill them full of good intentions”). “Father Thy Will Be Done” is a prayer of surrender built around the famous line from the Lord’s Prayer. Arends would later reveal that she wrote the song in anticipation of a funeral for the husband of one of her friends. “There You Are” revisits the theme of finding God’s presence in little and surprising aspects of everyday life. “This I Know” is one of Arends’ most aggressive country-rock tracks, listing a few certainties in life—the title derives from a line of the children’s song “Jesus Loves Me.”

This Much I Understand opens with a song called “Happy,” which sets the tone for what one reviewer called an “angst-free approach” (“You can call me a child / But I will not lie down . . . I will dare to dream / I will dare to believe”). On the same record, “Surprised Within Joy” displays a traditional gospel jubilation. Still, the overall mood of *This Much I Understand* is more contemplative and introspective than the first two records, reflecting perhaps Arends’ grief over the death of her close friend **Rich Mullins**. “We’ve Been Waiting for You” is a touching reflection on the birth of the artist’s first child set against a simple piano accompaniment. The retrospective hits package (*Seize the Day*) includes live versions of five songs (featuring guest performances by **Phil Keaggy** and Mac Powell of **Third Day**) and a new version of the traditional youth group song, “They’ll Know We Are Christians by Our Love.”

Arends’ songs are typically perceptive—she holds a degree in psychology, as well as ones in English and music—and her lyrics betray the sort of personal intimacy found in **Amy Grant**’s best work (e.g., *Behind the Eyes*). “Lyrics that softly startle,” *CCM* magazine said, as early as 1995. The song “In Between” relates, “We remember the highs / We can’t forget the lows / We live most of our lives / Somewhere in between.” Then, with an honest ambiguity that recalls **Sam Phillips**, it continues, “We are heroes, we are villains / We are lovers, we are leavers / We are skeptics or believers / We are everything in between.” In 2000, Arends published a vulnerable and articulate autobiography called *Living the Questions* (Harvest House).

For trivia buffs: one of the guitars heard behind Arends on *This Much I Understand* belongs to Randy Bachman (of The Guess Who and Bachman Turner Overdrive). The album was recorded at a Vancouver studio owned by Bachman, and he sat in on certain numbers, especially “Even the Wallflowers.”

Christian radio hits: “The Power of Love” (# 10 in 1996); “I Can Hear You” (# 13 in 1996); “New Year’s Day” (# 12 in 1997); “Do What You Do” (# 3 in 1997); “Big Deal” (# 13 in 1997); “Father, Thy Will Be Done” (# 14 in 1998).

Argyle Park

Buka; Klay Scott. 1995—*Misguided* (R.E.X.).

The saga of Argyle Park is one of the more curious and potentially confusing stories in the annals of Christian metal music. Often hailed as “the greatest Christian industrial band ever,” the group (or duo) made but one album, disbanded, and then reappeared (sort of) as **AP2**. An unusual amount of disinformation was dispensed with regard to Argyle Park, sometimes delightedly by the band itself, and then even more so by fans who were either confused or just joining in the fun of confounding reporters trying to write books like this one.

First, the personnel. The album credits list three group members: Buka, Deathwish, and Dred. Buka is the professional name for a performer who claims to have been a child of missionary parents and to have become enamored of percussion and “worldbeat” sounds while growing up in Africa. Dred and Deathwish, however, are both just aliases for Klay Scott, who used to go by the name Scott Albert and under that name gained renown for his work in **Circle of Dust**. Later, he would record with **Angeldust** and decide to change his name to both Klayton and Celldweller. In addition to the official members (Buka and Scott), Argyle Park included a plethora of guest performers, especially vocalists. The participation of members of **Chatterbox** (Jeff Bellew), **The Crucified** (Mark Salomon), **Focused** (Dirk Lemmenes), Foetus (Jim Thirwell), **Klank** (Daren Diolosa), **Mortal/Fold Zandura** (Jyro), and the **Vigilantes of Love** (Chris Donohue) has been confirmed, in addition to Tommy Victor of the secular band Prong.

Next, the lyrics. For a Christian album, the record evinces a surprisingly negative perspective, musing relentlessly on the pain of life, often from a position of bitterness, with no hint of hope or redemption. Supposedly, R.E.X. refused to print the lyrics for the album’s liner notes in the false hope that they would prove unrecognizable; a spoken word conclusion to the song “Doomsayer” was removed at the insistence of label executives but then sneakily reinserted by the band as a hidden track. A wave of speculation at the Argyle Park website focused on the object of the group’s hostility. Were they angry at the church? Or at God? Eventually, the group answered these queries with the following statement: “The album was against a

person that we looked up to and trusted immensely. He betrayed our trust and led us down a path that brought us much pain and confusion.”

The sound of Argyle Park was an amalgam of various styles competing for attention in metal music at the time. Buka told *HM* magazine that the whole concept was to make something “that has never been heard before.” He described the process as one in which “we took all the styles we like and mixed them into one album.” Thus, the record sways between sounds reminiscent of groups like Enigma and Nine Inch Nails. Throughout the entire record, however, the trademarks of industrial music can be heard: aggressive guitars, pummeling drum machines, and powerful, inhumanly distorted vocals. “Doomsayer” is industrial rap. In addition to their one album, Argyle Park recorded the **Steve Taylor** song “Drive, He Said” and the **Stryper** tune “Lonely” for tribute albums honoring those artists.

For trivia buffs: Tommy Victor liked the music to the song “Doomsayer” and supposedly recorded it with rewritten lyrics and a new name for a Prong album.

'Ark

James Kehn, voc., drums; Dave Kelley, voc., gr.; Derek Jeffery, voc., gr.; David MacKay, bass; Al Perkins, steel gr. 1979—*The Angels Come* (Spirit).

Criminally unsuccessful, the pop band 'Ark was composed of country-rock star **Al Perkins** and four guys from the United Kingdom. They made one album of likable, melodic songs with a sound that suggested a merger between the Hollies and the Byrds (think, Crosby-Nash). At their best, they were able to find that line between aggressive pop and melodic rock that groups like the Rolling Stones demonstrate so well on “Out of Time” or “Ruby Tuesday.” The opening track, “Hold Me Tonight,” is but one of the pop gems ready to delight the ear and the soul with its jangly guitars, sweet British harmonies, and simple but evangelical lyrics (“Oh, Lord, a miracle is changing my life”). 'Ark's one-and-only album is long out of print and is not even sought by collectors—but it should be. **Dave Kelley** later released a solo album.

A different Christian group named Ark (with no apostrophe) released an album named *Voyages* independently in 1978. This band was from South Carolina.

Christian radio hits: “Standin’ at the Door” (# 24 in 1979).

ArkAngel (a.k.a. Redemption) and Radiohalo

Richard Conine, kybrd.; Bekah Crabb, voc.; Kemper Crabb, voc., gr.; Dave Marshall, gr.; Randy Sanchez, drums. By Redemption: 1975—*Look Up* (Evan Comm). By ArkAngel: 1980—*Warrior* (Joyeuse Garde). By Radiohalo: 1992—*Illuminations* (Urgent).

www.kempercrabb.com/Pages/Home.html

Best remembered as the birthing ground of **Kemper Crabb**, ArkAngel released one of the most innovative and significant albums in the history of Christian rock. *Warrior* set new standards for artistic quality and innovation; at a time when many Christian artists were blatantly trying to imitate the sounds of successful secular performers, ArkAngel came out with a rock masterpiece that sounded nothing like anything that anyone had ever heard before—in either arena.

The group effectively began as an acoustic group associated with Castle Hills Baptist Church in San Antonio. Called Redemption, they released one album titled *Look Up* in 1973 (lineup: Richard Conine, Bekah and Kemper Crabb, with Ken Freeman also on vocals). Only 1000 copies of the record were pressed, and it would become one of the most sought-after collector's items in Christian music. With songs like "Anti-Satan Boogie" and the psychy "New Jerusalem," it bears no resemblance sonically to the progressive art-rock for which ArkAngel would be known. Evincing what *Jesus Music* calls "homespun charm" and "delicate murmuring," the album also includes covers of some classic Jesus music songs: **Blessed Hope's** "Something More"; **Love Song's** "Front Seat, Back Seat"; **Jamie Owens (Collins's)** "May I Introduce You to a Friend."

Redemption relocated to Houston, became ArkAngel, and recorded *Warrior* with the lineup listed above. Though the group was signed to StarSong, the album was released on an independent label named after Lancelot's castle in *Le Mort d'Arthur*. One song off the record, "Dwelling Place," was a significant regional hit in the general market, reaching Number One on some Houston radio stations. Musically, *Warrior* comes closest to the sound of such progressive art-rock groups as Pink Floyd or Yes, but its utilization of medieval instruments and textures puts it in a class of its own. Many years later, some of those influences would filter into the popularity of Celtic music, but by any standard, ArkAngel was ahead of the game. The song "Praises in the Old Tongue" (sung here by Bekah) is an ancient poem written by the seventh-century herdsman Caedmon (from whom **Caedmon's Call** takes its name) that Kemper Crabb transcribed and set to music. The title track, "Warrior," reads like something out of the book of Psalms, but is an original composition inspired by Revelation 19:11–12. "The Lord is a Warrior," sings Crabb, "The Lord is mighty in battle . . . He gives strength unto His people . . . The angel of the Lord camps around the ones who fear Him." The album was praised by *CCM* as "excellent, innovative, and varied," though the reviewer clearly didn't get the medieval fascination—and wasn't too sure about all the fantasy images, either. The record-buying public didn't really get it either; *Warrior* would require another decade to come into its own as a classic of Christian rock. In the meantime, **Kemper Crabb** went on

to a solo career, recording a worship album called *The Vigil* that is often considered (alongside *Warrior*) to be one of the most creative and musically adept pieces in the contemporary Christian music genre.

In the early '90s, members of ArkAngel (the Crabbs, Dave Marshall, and Randy Sanchez) toured under the name Radiohalo. An album by Radiohalo called *Illumination* was released in 1992; it includes some new material recorded by just Marshall and the Crabbs as well as tracks recorded by ArkAngel members between 1984 and 1991. Despite the latter inclusions, however, Radiohalo should really be thought of as a separate entity and not just as ArkAngel under another name. Their sound is more in line with the world-beat style of Talking Heads or Peter Gabriel than with the art-rock of *Warrior*, though the latter influences surface on "Persistence of Vision" and the title track. The song "Sea of Blood" is a hyperbolic antiabortion song that would be popular with some pro-life groups. Toward the end of the '90s, Kemper and Bekah Crabb divorced; he played with **Caedmon's Call** for a brief spell and then joined **Atomic Opera**. An ordained Anglican priest, he is regarded as an intellectual within the contemporary Christian music community and is often looked to as a senior statesman for commentary on various issues. He writes a regular column "The Christian and the Arts" for *HM* magazine. **Caedmon's Call** covered the song "Warrior" on their worship album in 2001.

Armageddon Experience

Personnel list unavailable. 1970—*Armageddon Experience* (M/M).

Little is known of the Jesus movement group Armageddon Experience except that it showcased the early writing talents of **Michael Omartian**. The band was officially sponsored by Campus Crusade for Christ, which assembled several such ministry teams from their recruits to reach youth with a now sound and message (others included The Forerunners, Great Commission Co., and The New Folk). Creativity was a low priority and—from the perspective of rock and roll at least—the groups were hilariously trite. Much about Armageddon Experience seems camp, from the photo of eight (unidentified) clean-cut kids in their Sunday best to the way words like *groovy* get sprinkled into the mix just to show how hip they are. The group played at the *Explo '72* rock festival (the Jesus movement's answer to Woodstock) and gained a coveted spot on the soundtrack album from that festival, which provided many young Americans with their first introduction to contemporary Christian music (almost 200,000 copies were distributed free through a TV campaign). Nestled between songs by **Johnny Cash** and **Randy Matthews** was AG's tune "One Way," proclaiming the slogan of the Jesus movement. Turns

out, it's a great song, well performed, with a solid rock beat. The group performed four Omartian songs on their self-titled album ("I've Got the Love," "People in Motion," "Revolution Now," "God Leads a Sheltered Life") along with **Noel Paul Stookey's** "I Believe in You." The song "I've Got the Love" would later appear on the compilation album *Beginnings* (Sonrise, 1994) and both that song and "God Leads a Sheltered Life" can be found on *The Rock Revival: Original Music from the Jesus Movement* (Sonrise, 1994).

Armageddon Holocaust

Chaotik Armageddon; Destruktiv Armageddon; Dark Doktor; Dark Thriller. 2000—*Into Total Destruction* (THT Productions).

Armageddon Holocaust may be listed as one example of numerous independent bands that occupy a very dark Christian underground. The liner notes for *Into Total Destruction* lists the band members' fake names without any indication of what instruments they play. The album appears to employ a drum machine and features massive overlays of loud guitars playing very brutal rhythms. The vocals are not merely screamed but screeched, and what lyrics are recognizable prophesy death and destruction against God's enemies. Thus, the title track: "Time to die! Time to suffer! . . . Burn! Burn! Burn! / Hell awaits! / Burn! Burn! Burn! / Hell awaits!" Needless to say, this all comes off a bit cultic and more than a little disturbing in comparison to most contemporary Christian music.

Riley Armstrong

2000—*Riley Armstrong* (Flicker).

www.rileyarmstrong.com

Folk-beat singer/songwriter/producer Riley Armstrong comes from the remote farm town of Dapp, Alberta. Discovered by **Audio Adrenaline**, he recorded his first album for that group's start-up label at age twenty-three, shortly after earning a college degree in sound engineering. His self-produced music features simple vocals and acoustic guitars against a backdrop of all sorts of interesting sounds (banjos, oboes, synthesizers, drum machines). Armstrong reminds most reviewers of Beck, with two caveats: a) his voice is noticeably smoother, reminiscent of **Steven Curtis Chapman**; and b) he doesn't sing about being a loser who wants to die. His album produced an immediate hit with the song "Greater Than," which marvels at the wonders of creation and muses that its Creator must be more marvelous still. Another song, "The Table," reflects on warm, family gatherings. "Sleep" is a humorous, catchy number reminiscent of James Taylor's "Traffic Jam"; the lyrics deal with a topic with which many can identify: "By 9 a.m. my brain and body finally decide to meet / and we come to the same conclusion as yesterday . . . I never get enough

sleep." The album also includes a cover of Paul Simon's "Bridge over Troubled Water."

Vanessa Bell Armstrong

Selected: 1987—*Vanessa Bell Armstrong* (Verity); 1989—*Wonderful One*; 1990—*Greatest Hits* (Muscle Shoals); 1993—*Something on the Inside* (Verity); 1995—*The Secret Is Out*; 1997—*The Truth about Christmas*; 1998—*Desire of My Heart: Live in Detroit*; 1999—*The Best of Vanessa Bell Armstrong* (Verity).

Vanessa Bell Armstrong is a gospel singer whose career has often answered the question, "What if **Aretha Franklin** had not left gospel for soul back in the '60s?" Over the years, Armstrong's powerful Aretha-like voice has been put to marvelous use singing the spirituals and hymns of traditional gospel music. A sampling of her many albums in that genre is found on the *Greatest Hits* package listed above. But just as Aretha occasionally ventures back into gospel, so Armstrong experiments now and then in the opposite direction. With her self-titled album, she tried out the Atlantic sound that made Aretha a star, belting out what she calls "message songs" (with lyrics informed by a Christian stance, but lacking specific religious references) to a strong R&B beat. The song "You Bring Out the Best in Me" was a hit on *Billboard's* Black Music charts. Then Armstrong collaborated with energetic producer John P. Kee to produce an album of passionate jazzy songs with unambiguous lyrics for fans of contemporary gospel. The result was *The Secret Is Out*. Kee performs with her on the title track. The album also includes a rousing version of the hymn "Love Lifted Me."

Christian radio hits: "Greater Than" (# 9 in 2000).

Ash Mundaе

Chuck Ash, voc., gtr.; Jeremy Ash, drums. 2000—*Model Citizen* (Red Hill).

Ash Mundaе is a retro-'80s pop band composed of two brothers who previously formed the nucleus of a Christian group called **The Altered**. The Illinois duo come from a musical family: their father served as a professional drummer in numerous bands, and their mother sang with a '50s group featured on the Ted Mack Amateur Hour. Ash Mundaе moves away from the Midwest rock sound of **The Altered** to embrace a style that bears strong influence of Duran Duran, The Cars, and Human League. "In God's Eyes" is a standout track, with lyrics that remind the listeners of their worth in God's eyes. The title track and "Broke" evince some good-natured and tongue-in-cheek humor. "Hope" and "Heaven Waits" are more serious and poetic offerings, which the brothers say were inspired by the tragic adventures of Jean Valjean recounted in the novel *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo.

Susan Ashton

1991—*Wakened by the Wind* (Sparrow); 1992—*Angels of Mercy*; 1993—*Susan Ashton*; 1995—*So Far: The Best of Susan Ashton, Vol. 1*; 1996—*A Distant Call*; 1999—*Closer* (Capitol).

www.capitol-nashville.com

Almost from the start, Christian music critics claimed that Susan Ashton (b. 1967) had what it takes to make a mark in the world of mainstream country music, and they expressed puzzlement as to why she did not capitalize more on what was clearly her forté. The redhead from Houston, whose personality is described in her Capitol press release as “bubbly and fun and flirty,” did eventually do so and was soon opening tours for Garth Brooks and singing backup on songs she had previously recorded herself, now done by Brooks (“You Move Me”) or Martina McBride (“Here in My Heart”). She has also partnered with **Glen Campbell** (“What’s Going Without Saying”) and Patsy Loveless (“To Have You Back Again”).

Ashton’s coming-to-faith testimony provides a tribute to youth-to-youth evangelism programs. Raised as a member of Houston’s Evangelical Temple, she says she attended only because her parents made her and lacked any true devotion to spiritual matters. She likewise attended the church’s youth night one time after striking a bargain with her parents that if she didn’t like it she would never have to go back. She *didn’t* like it and would never have returned if one of the members had not called her that week to tell her how glad the group was that she had come. “It blew me away that someone had actually noticed me,” she would later relate, and the phone call inspired her to return and ultimately become a devout member of the group. After high school, Ashton was committed to using her life to “sing for the Lord,” and she took on a number of session projects, notably singing with **Wayne Watson** on his hit song “Watercolor Ponies,” and working with **Dallas Holm**.

Ashton’s first three albums were all produced by veteran **Wayne Kirkpatrick**, who also wrote much of the material. The debut album *Wakened by the Wind* was well received but established her as just one more competent female vocalist in the crowded adult contemporary market. *CCM* likened her style to “that of **Kim Hill** or the softer side of **Margaret Becker**,” citing also the inevitable Shawn Colvin comparison that seemed to be applied to most Christian female vocalists at the time. The songs themselves, however, plunge much deeper than stereotypical Christian pop. In “No One Knows My Heart” (written with Kirkpatrick and **Billy Sprague**) she declares, “There’s an agony in living / But there’s a comfort in the truth.” Ashton herself cowrote the album’s best song, “Beyond Justice to Mercy” (with Sprague again, and Paula Carpenter). Kirkpatrick’s “Down on My Knees” describes the necessity of prayer, and his “Benediction” becomes Ashton’s request for di-

vine blessing on the path she has chosen. A couple of tracks (“Land of Nod,” “Ball and Chain”) hint at the country sound that would come to fruition later. As it turned out, *Wakened by the Wind* was the debut album of the year, spawning four Christian radio hits and setting new sales records for first albums by Christian soloists.

The follow-up album, *Angels of Mercy*, mostly continues in the same vein but exhibits a switch to crossover country as its songlist progresses. It opens with a rock song (“Here in My Heart”) that places Ashton in brief competition with the *harder* side of **Margaret Becker**. “Grand Canyon” is one of Kirkpatrick’s best songs, but in general the album’s later songs (the country ones—“Innocence Lost,” “When Are You Coming Back?” “Walk On By”) were the most praised. Still, reviewers were referring to Ashton as “the female **Steven Curtis Chapman**” (ultimately, the female **Gary Chapman** would prove more appropriate). Her third eponymous album presents “more of the same,” as most reviews heralded—many as good news, some as a complaint. It opens somewhat daringly with a seven-and-a-half minute slow song called “Summer Solstice,” which is probably its strongest track. “Remember Not” deals with forgiveness and “Call of the Wild” with a marriage gone awry due to a spouse’s restless wanderings. “Waiting for Your Love to Come” reminded a *CCM* reviewer of The Eagles’ “Best of My Love.” *A Distant Call* actually has Ashton working with three different producers (Kirkpatrick, **Brown Bannister**, and **Michael Omartian**). Seventies-style rockers (“Crooked Man”) mix with down-home country (“Love Profound,” with Allison Krauss and Union Station) and tender love songs (“Spinning Like a Wheel”) in an eclectic mix that fans had come to expect and critics to regret.

It was Ashton’s first album for Capitol that cemented her identity as a country singer. The opening song, “Come On Out of the Rain,” encourages a brokenhearted guy to give romance another try. “You’re Lucky I Love You” reminds a sweetheart that he’s got it good. “Breathless” expresses some welcome sensuality that may never have been allowed on an officially Christian release (“He’s got me learnin’ and burnin’ and tossin’ and turnin’ and yearnin’ for him all night”). “I Ain’t Gonna Fall for Love Again” features a duet vocal with Vince Gill and has a classic country sound that makes it one of the album’s strongest offerings. Two songs, “Shot for the Moon” and “Can’t Cry Hard Enough,” are especially heart-wrenching. The latter expresses the overwhelming grief of losing a loved one to death.

Two of Ashton’s greatest strengths have been song selection—an important attribute for a singer who is not primarily a songwriter—and interpretation (Gordon Kennedy says, “A song is safe when Susan sings it”). Estrangement is a familiar theme in her songs. “Grand Canyon” describes the spiritual chasm experienced by people who feel far from God; “Summer

Solstice” (by **Wayne Kirkpatrick**) reflects on the recognition that love or faith has grown cold (“what I thought to be maturity / was just neglect that I tried to vindicate”). In the hauntingly beautiful “Lonely River,” her voice flows alongside lush piano and gentle strings to express the forlorn hope that God is working in ways unseen. “Innocence Lost” (by Karey and **Wayne Kirkpatrick**) expresses a longing for what philosopher Paul Ricoeur calls “the second naivete”: “Milton lost his paradise / Dorothy lost her way / Vincent lost his sanity / Thomas lost his faith / Hoover lost the second time / Sigmund lost his friend / Me, I lost my innocence / And I want it back again.”

Ashton has also contributed her soothing soprano to a number of various artist projects, notably dueting with country crooner **Collin Raye** on the title tune for a **Jim Brickman** Christmas release called *The Gift* (Windham Hill, 1997). That song would become a crossover hit, charting at Number Sixty-five on *Billboard*’s mainstream Top 40 chart, but doing significantly better in both country and adult contemporary markets. Ashton has also sung duets with Billy Dean on “In the Garden” for *Amazing Grace: A Country Salute to Gospel* (Sparrow, 1995) and with **Gary Chapman** on John Lennon’s “In My Life” for the Omartian-produced *Come Together: America Salutes the Beatles* (Capitol, 1995). She sang “Summer Snow” on a **Keith Green** tribute project (*No Compromise*, Sparrow, 1992) and joined several other women artists on *Listen to Our Hearts* (Sparrow, 1998). She also constitutes one-third of the trio, **Ashton, Becker, and Denté**.

For trivia buffs: Susan Ashton’s given name was Susan Hill. She adopted the professional name to avoid being confused with Christian singer **Kim Hill**.

Christian radio hits: “Down on My Knees” (# 2 in 1991); “Benediction” (# 4 in 1991); “In Amazing Grace Land” (# 3 in 1992); “Ball and Chain” (# 18 in 1992); “Here in My Heart” (# 3 in 1992); “Grand Canyon” (# 17 in 1992); “Hunger and Thirst” (# 20 in 1993); “Walk On By” (# 6 in 1993); “Waiting for Your Love to Come” (# 24 in 1994); “Remember Not” (# 3 in 1994); “All Kinds of People” (# 5 in 1996).

Ashton, Becker, and Denté

Susan Ashton, voc.; Margaret Becker, voc.; and Christian Denté, voc. 1994—*Along the Road* (Sparrow).

Three of the most popular female vocalists in Christian music—**Susan Ashton, Margaret Becker**, and Christine Denté (of **Out of the Grey**)—combined their talents for a single album and supporting tour in 1994. The record was produced by **Wayne Kirkpatrick** (responsible for most of Ashton’s work), who also served as chief songwriter. In general, the artists take turns on lead vocals, such that the album amounts to a compilation of tunes by each of the three with the other two providing harmony and backup. There is, however, an overall feel of synchrony, as rhythmic, acoustic guitar

serves as the primary accompaniment on most tracks. The title tune was written by Dan Fogelberg and expresses a basic perspective on life as a work-in-progress.

Christian radio hits: “Oh Me of Little Faith” (# 19 in 1994); “Walk On” (# 9 in 1995).

Samuel Brinsley Ashworth

2000—*Sauté* (independent).

Samuel Brinsley Ashworth is regarded in Christian music circles as one to watch. He is the son of superstar **Charlie Peacock**. Aware that he will have to suffer that burden of fame, the talented youth has sought to enter the Christian music scene gently—for example, by doing backing vocals on projects his father produces. By age sixteen, however, he had composed the song “I Won’t Stay Long,” which was recorded by **Sixpence None the Richer**. He also cowrote “Seasons Always Change” with **Sarah Masen**. He then privately released a debut of his own work. Of course, the comparisons were inevitable: his voice sounds like Dad’s and the music has the same Beatlesque quality. Still, *True Tunes* announced to the world: “he’s good.”

As If

Phil Goss, voc., gtr., kybrd.; Phil Heard, drums; Steve Rothwell, bass. 1996—*Forget Me Not* (New Dawn); 1999—*Strange Blue Thing*.

The UK trio that goes by the minimalist title *As If* performs techno dance music with straightforward evangelistic lyrics. Their sound can be located somewhere on the spectrum between New Order and Depeche Mode, with some creative twists, such as the eastern-inflected introduction to the song “Backwards” on their second album. The song “Area 51,” also from that record, features apocalyptic you’ve-been-left-behind lyrics: “I don’t know what’s happening / I see my friends and loved ones ascend in the clouds.”

Asight Unseen

Derek Bell, gtr.; Jason Lohrke, voc.; Mike Longridge, gtr.; John Oliveira, bass; Bert Sanchez, drums. 1991—*Circus of Shame* (New Breed); 1993—*Hollywood Proverbs* (MetroOne).

Asight Unseen was an alternative Christian band that created a hard-grunge sound in the same ballpark as **Collective Soul**, whose graphic style was copied for their debut CD’s cover design. Associated with the Vineyard churches, they viewed themselves as a ministry band. “We’re very upfront,” Lohrke told *HM* magazine. “Our purpose is evangelism.” They often performed in churches and concluded concerts with altar calls and appeals to the Lord for healing and deliverance. Fans of hard-rocking guitar music may have been attracted to those

concerts by the group's two well-received albums. The debut opens with "Road to Bonos," which features a heavy smattering of horns. It also includes the infectious title track (with an INXS groove) and "Electric Angel Blues," which seems influenced by early **U2** and *Let It Bleed*-era Rolling Stones. The latter song winds down with an electrified version of the Lord's Prayer. *Hollywood Proverbs* contains "The Chant," a psychedelic tune that spells out the group's favorite theme: holiness, or being totally sold-out to God. The same theme is picked up in "Dave," a colloquial song about biblical King David. "The Big Watusi" is simply a fun, very upbeat tune that Lohrke says can "refer to whatever you want it to." The group liked to cover Lenny Kravitz's "Rosemary" in concert. After Asight Unseen disbanded, Jason Lohrke and John Oliveira went on to record an independent, self-titled album with a group called Bionic Jodi in 1998.

As I Lay Dying

Noah Chase, bass; Tim Lambesis, voc.; Jordan Mancino, drums; Evan White, gtr. 2001—*Beneath the Encasing of Ashes* (Pluto).

As I Lay Dying is a hybrid punk-metal act that has a brutal sound often likened to that of **Zao**. The group initially formed in San Diego in the late '90s, broke up while lead singer Tim Lambesis worked with the Texas band Society's Finest, then re-formed with a new lineup (in San Diego again) in 2001. Their debut album *Beneath the Encasing of Ashes* is unrelenting in its intensity, mixing fast hard songs with slow heavy numbers. As the group's name suggests, mortality is a frequent lyrical theme. On "Forced to Die," Lambesis invites the divine discipline that brings self-denial: "If this is what it takes to bring me to my knees / Then feed me pain until I realize I am but a slave." The song "When This World Fades" is a memorial tribute to the mother of guitarist Evan White.

Aslan (Airborn)

Greg Buick, kybrd.; Ted Kallman, gtr., voc.; Linda Kendall, voc.; Jeff Roley, gtr., voc.; Scott Roley, gtr., voc.; Martin Vipond, bass. 1972—*Aslan* (Airborn).

At least four different Christian groups have called themselves Aslan, after the lion who serves as a Christ figure in C. S. Lewis's Narnia tales. The one that recorded for Airborn featured nice blends of male and female harmonies. Their only album was produced by **Ron Moore**, who later had a career in Christian music himself. **Scott Roley** went on to sing on Moore's albums and to form the group **Albrecht and Roley (and Moore)** before launching a solo career. One of the group's better songs, "Further Up and Further In," turns up not only here but on the first *two* **Albrecht and Roley (and Moore)** albums. To avoid confusion with the Maranatha

band, this Aslan changed its name to Stillwaters in 1974 and toured for a while under that name.

Aslan (Maranatha)

Jim Abdo, voc., gtr., kybrd.; Rick Conklin, voc., bass; Johnnie Graves, drums; Mike Holmes, voc., gtr., bass; Bill Hoppe, kybrd.; Toni McWilliams, voc., violin. No albums.

<http://hometown.aol.com/crparavel/index.html>

Not to be confused with the group(s) listed above or below, the Aslan that worked with Maranatha was active in California from 1972 to 1978. The group began as In His Name but then decided the name of the Narnia lion had more of a ring to it. They were harder rocking than many of the Maranatha folk groups, and Toni McWilliams' violin also gave them a somewhat distinctive sound for Jesus music at the time. In general, they had a progressive, art-rock sound with ambitious harmonies, fitting into the same ballpark as acts like **Kansas** or **ELO**. The band was noted for its musicianship, performing music that was carefully orchestrated and meticulously rehearsed. The members were also well known for their humor, for being a wacky group that could almost be counted on to hit the stage in monkey masks, perform a song with kazooes, or pull some other bizarre and as-yet-untried stunt. Wendy Carter Fremin of **Children of the Day** once called Aslan "the best Maranatha band without an album" and **Erick Nelson** says they were the first group he knows of to receive a standing ovation at Calvary Chapel (which just wasn't done). Aslan toured extensively, opening for Nelson and other Maranatha artists, but they never recorded an album. They did place one song, "Who Loves the Lonely?" on the compilation disc *Maranatha Six: A Family Portrait*. That song has the feel of Elton John's *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road* material. Opening with a majestic church organ, it moves quickly into a building, piano-driven song about God's compassion for the disaffected and dispossessed denizens of urban America. When the guitars arrive, they soar for a moment that is too brief, but indicative of what Aslan was apparently capable of delivering. Aslan also recorded their one-time signature song "In His Name" for *Maranatha Five* (1976), but it was pulled for not fitting in with the rest of the songs (= being too rocky). Bill Hoppe played synthesizers (uncredited) on **Daniel Amos'** classic *Shotgun Angel* album. As of 2001, Abdo, Rick Conklin, and Hoppe were said to be recording together under the name Broken Works.

Aslan (UK)

Personnel list unavailable. 1976—*Paws for Thought* (Profile); 1977—*Second Helpings*.

The Narnia lion Aslan gave its name to at least three American Jesus music groups (see above and below) but was also

claimed by a progressive folk band in the homeland of its creator. The group featured the same combination of layered vocals and acoustic Renaissance instruments (autoharp, recorder, glockenspiel) that groups like **Caedmon's Call** would bring to the fore two decades later. The first album features some traditional songs and cover tunes (including covers of **Parchment** songs); the second record is mostly original material. "Beauty" is simply a poem about creation recited (not sung) over acoustic guitar. "The King" is performed a capella. Other standout cuts include "Earthbound," "Song of the Seasons," and "The Ballad of Thomas Cook."

Aslan (Young Life)

Mike Bizanovich, gtr.; Mike Coates, kybrd.; Tony Congi, voc., gtr.; Bill McCoy, voc., gtr.; Brian O'Konski, voc., bass (-1997) // Dan Sewell, bass (+1997). 1997—*It's Amazing* (custom).

Yet another Christian group called Aslan worked with the organization Young Life in the '70s and '80s. A folk-rock group with a slight country air, the group played at camps and conferences throughout the country and attracted a strong following among Young Life members. They were apparently based in Ohio and recorded an album of eleven songs in the early '80s, about which no information is available. In the late '90s, members of the group reunited to record five new songs for inclusion on an expanded edition of this early album on compact disc. Aslan specialized in ballads but was also competent for the occasional bluegrass romp ("Why Cry?"). Perhaps their most popular tune is the footstomping **Larry Norman**esque "Jesus is the Rock and He Rolls My Blues Away." The songs understandably (and appropriately) focus on typical youth group themes. "Born out of His Love" features a campfire sing-along chorus expressing the thought of its title. "Waiting for the Captain" finds the group experimenting with a little more complexity, trying out some spacey synth effects and art-rock inferences.

ATF

See **After the Fire**.

Atomic Opera

Frank Hart, voc.; Len Sonnier, bass (-1992); Jonathan Marshall, gtr. (-1996); Mark Poindexter, drums (-1997) // Jonas Velasco, bass (+1992, -1996); Kemper Crabb, voc., mandolin (+1996); Ryan Birsinger, bass (+1997); John Simmons, drums (+1997). 1994—*For Madmen Only* (Collision); 1997—*Penguin Dust* (independent); 1999—*Alpha and Oranges*; 2000—*Gospel Cola* (Metal Blade).

www.atomicopera.com

Crossover Christian artists Atomic Opera had made an impressive splash in the general market even before legend

Kemper Crabb joined the band. Under the leadership of Frank Hart, who grew up listening to Crabb's seminal Jesus movement band **ArkAngel**, the Houston group placed a single ("Justice") on MTV and metal radio stations and earned a spot as opening act for the very worldly group Dio. When Crabb signed on, all bets were off. He is featured on *Penguin Dust* and *Gospel Cola*. The group continues to be better known in the general market than in the Christian subculture, despite the obvious signs of their faith.

The first album was well received by fans of heavy Christian music, with the group being compared to **King's X** and **Galactic Cowboys** (both of whom also come from Houston). The hit "Justice" features the lyric, "When I pray 'Have mercy,' I will never ask for justice." Another song, "Blackness," proclaims, "We all want to change the world / But we don't want to change our mind." Unfortunately, the Collision label dissolved, leaving Atomic Opera to distribute their next two albums privately—selling them at concerts or through the mail. *Penguin Dust* is notable for speaking against what Hart calls the "tide of cynical disregard" in our society. "Make a God" is about humanity's propensity to fashion an image of God that reflects their own ideals. "Spirit of the Age" offers a litany of things that everybody knows, with the caveat that "most of the things that everybody knows are not true" (actually a quote from Batman). Samples of such bits of questionable conventional wisdom include the propositions "you should only love someone who cares for you" and "you should believe in yourself for the truth." The song most sure to grab attention on *Penguin Dust*, however, is "God of Hate," which lists things that the Bible says God hates (e.g., rebellion, greed, violence, death). Hart claims he wrote the lyrics—inspired by Reformed theology—as a counterpoint against "the smarmy God of Hallmark." A number of other songs also portray the group's religious leanings: "Thirst" draws its lyrics from the psalms; "Watergrave" is a remake of an old song by **The Imperials**. The next album, *Alpha and Oranges*, was a collection of early songs recorded between 1989 and 1993 with the band's original lineup, before they found their distinctive sound.

Gospel Cola is the group's first major label release with the definitive lineup (Hart, Crabb, Ryan Birsinger, John Simmons). Crabb brings an infusion of progressive art-rock that blends into the band's already established heavy metal sound. The result is something unique, a "weirdness that works," as *Phantom Tollbooth* said. Not many heavy metal bands display a strong penchant for vocal harmony, and very few feature such instruments as dulcimer, bouzouki, ocarina, or recorder (though Jethro Tull did do some amazing things with a flute). *Christian Music* began their review with the affirmation, "This ain't your daddy's heavy metal." The song "Malediction" (an anti-abortion anthem) begins with medieval and acoustic sounds

that are eventually overwhelmed by a tidal wave of electric guitars. Lyrically, the song has a poetic quality that lifts it above typical sentimental or sensationalist (cf. **Gramma-train's** "Execution") treatments of the topic: "Torn from their mother's womb / Denied the sky, denied a tomb / Conceived in lust to their own ruin." "Silence" is a reminder that God communicates through silences as effectively as through words. "Muse" laments the dismal state of true art in the (post)modern world ("too many singers, not enough music"). "Winterland" takes its cue from C. S. Lewis's Narnia tales, which describe a place that is "always winter but never Christmas." The song "Jesus Junk" ridicules those who, in Hart's words, are "so wrapped up in their little Christian subculture or ghetto that they need to de-secularize everything in their life," searching for Christian music, Christian belt buckles and, of course . . . Gospel Cola. The album packaging for *Gospel Cola* includes liner notes with numerous quips such as "Warning: Traces of Neo Platonism and Pietism may lead to chronic stupidity."

Atomic Opera is almost the stereotypical band of Christians that does not want to be known as a Christian band. In their case, however, the reluctance to accept such a label is not motivated just by the desire to avoid ignorant stereotypes on the part of those who think Christian music means **Amy Grant** and **DC Talk**. Rather, the aversion to such labeling arises from outright hostility against the Christian music industry and its philosophies. Hart describes that industry as interested in producing not art, but propaganda "designed to make their philosophical position look good." Such an approach does not sit well with the group that *HM* magazine describes as "a band of satirists and spiritual intellectuals." Hart continues, "We are not supposed to make art in order to draw people to Christ. We should make art because we are driven to make art and reflect Truth." Hart further insists that he does not want Atomic Opera to be known as a Christian band because, while he is not ashamed of Jesus Christ or of the gospel, he is "ashamed of what Christianity and the church mean to most people in our culture."

For trivia buffs: Atomic Opera's original bassist Jonathan Marshall is the son of another legendary guitarist, Dave Marshall, who once played with Crabb in **ArkAngel**.

Audio Adrenaline

Will McGinniss, bass; Mark Stuart, voc.; Bob Herdman, kybrd. (-2001); Barry Blair, gtr., voc. (-1998) // Tyler Burkum, gtr. (+ 1998); Ben Cissel, drums (+ 1998). 1992—*Audio Adrenaline* (ForeFront); 1993—*Don't Censor Me*; 1995—*Live Bootleg*; 1996—*Bloom*; 1998—*Some Kind of Zombie*; 1999—*Underdog*; 2001—*Hit Parade*; *Lift*.

www.audioadrenaline.com

Eclectic musical styles and high energy stage shows propelled Audio Adrenaline to fame and allowed them to domi-

nate Christian rock charts as one of the top Christian bands of the '90s. At the beginning of that decade, Barry Blair, Bob Herdman, and Mark Stuart were students at Kentucky Christian College playing in a rock group called A180. Will McGinniss brought a song that he had written ("My God") to their attention, a tape of the song fell into the hands of **Toby McKeehan** (of **DC Talk**), and ForeFront proffered a contract. Audio Adrenaline was officially formed in 1992.

The first album was none too impressive, but "P.D.A." (the only standout cut besides "My God") does reveal a slightly irreverent sense of humor that would gradually disappear as the group gained in significance. At many Christian schools public displays of affection are forbidden. With a Bible college chic worthy of **Terry Taylor**, AA uses the phrase for that prohibited behavior as a descriptive moniker for Christ's life and death (a public display of God's affection for humanity). "My God" displays similar wit through its raucous examples of politically incorrect interreligious dialogue ("Buddha was a fat man"). Success came with the second album (more than 300,000 units sold), largely due to "Big House," the most amiable Christian pop song of the decade. Ready-made for singing by church youth groups, "Big House" was catchy, ecumenical, and just a little bit silly. Hand motions were added and the song entered the repertoire of camp counselors quicker than one could say "Kum Ba Ya." Still, Audio Adrenaline found that they now had a signature song that sounded nothing like most of the music they played. "Big House" was a long way from the rap-metal music with which they had begun or from the alternative dance music they now preferred. The title track to *Don't Censor Me* offers a strong statement to radio stations that will play songs containing all sorts of profanity but *won't* play anything that testifies positively to faith in Jesus Christ. "Jesus and the California Kid" is an uncharacteristic Beach Boys-type song. "Rest Easy" is a very fine hymnic ballad that would go all but unnoticed in the group's oeuvre until someone wisely chose to include it on their "greatest hits" compilation in 2001 (where it is misidentified as coming from *Bloom*). Audio Adrenaline would later dismiss their first two albums as filled with cheerleader songs, but the edgy "We're a Band" and the blues-tinged "Scum Sweetheart" from the second outing remain examples of their all-time best material.

John Hampton, known for his work with Gin Blossoms, stepped in to produce much of the appropriately titled *Bloom*. The suddenly mature and decisive sound took critics by surprise and earned AA respect to match their celebrity. Most reviewers agree that this is the no-filler album—not a bad track on it—but songs that especially stand out include "Secret," "Good People," "I'm Not the King," and "I Hear Jesus Calling." The first of these, "Secret," opens the album on a strong rocking note and declares the group's intention not to be coy about

their beliefs. “I’m Not the King” has a strong Lenny Kravitz sound to it and features quirky-but-meaningful lyrics that somehow work Jim Morrison and Elvis references into a self-effacing tribute to Christ as the only King of Kings. “Good People” is a tribute to folk the band has met in its travels; musically it sounds a lot like **Geoff Moore and The Distance**, though it would have been the best song that band ever did. “I Hear Jesus Calling” is another of Audio Adrenaline’s blues masterpieces, a bit like “Scum Sweetheart” with more edifying lyrics. “Walk on Water” and “Never Gonna Be As Big As Jesus” would become worthy Christian radio hits.

The band survived the subsequent departure of guitarist Barry Blair by adding the then eighteen-year-old Tyler Burkum (nephew to Jason Burkum of **Believable Picnic**) and finished out the ’90s with two more albums that continue in the same vein as *Bloom* while demonstrating innovation and growth. *Some Kind of Zombie* is more funk-rock and less pop than previous AA albums. It scored big with “Blitz” (with guest horns from **The Supertones**), with “Chevette,” and with a song influenced by southern gospel, “The Lighthouse.” The title track is a powerful rock song with odd lyrics inspired by Mark Stuart’s observations of voodoo-worship in Haiti, where he was raised as the son of missionaries. It has something to do with being “dead to sin,” though the words don’t work quite as well as the beat. “People Like Me” is a wonderful pop song with some of the group’s best lyrics: “What do you think when you see / Continuous losers—the people like me / I hope you never believe / Just for a moment you’re better than me.” *Underdog* (the first truly self-produced album) features the foot-stomping “DC-10,” an old song written by Herdman before he joined the group. The words bring back that old AA wit, reminding listeners that they could meet their Maker at any time (“A 747 fell out of heaven / Crashed through the roof of a 7–11 / You’re working on a slurpee / Things get hazy / Reach for a twinkie / Now you’re pushing up daisies”). This, on the same package with a worshipful version of the classic hymn “It Is Well,” performed with **Jennifer Knapp**. “Get Down,” the ultra-funky first single from *Underdog*, was one of the best rock songs of the year. Stuart says, “It’s about becoming humble so God can be glorified.” “Mighty Good Leader” would provide a strong follow-up as another extremely moshable track with pretty straightforward lyrics. The title track to *Underdog* quotes from KC and the Sunshine Band (“That’s the way, uh-huh, we like it”) in a very un-disco ode to the humble. “Jesus Movement” is sort of acoustic hip-hop with a Latino twist, a bit like Sugar Ray’s “Every Morning.” Unfortunately *Underdog* concludes with a dumb, drawn-out bonus track (“Houseplant”) that might be humorous *once* but that nobody would ever want to hear a second time.

In 2001 Audio Adrenaline compiled some crowd favorites for a greatest hits album *Hit Parade*. Every critic would mourn omissions (“Don’t Censor Me”? “Scum Sweetheart”?), but the album does reveal a repertoire of seventeen sensational songs. Two of these are previously unreleased numbers that are among the band’s best. “Will Not Fade” is a hard-rocking song (almost like a **U2** anthem) that boldly proclaims the group’s persistent allegiance to the gospel. “One Like You” sets worshipful lyrics to a more pop beat that reveals the boys in AA had not lost their “Big House” sensibilities completely. Later in 2001, Audio Adrenaline (now a quartet) released *Lift*, a record that advertising hype presented as “a return to the stylings of *Bloom*” (clearly the group’s zenith). Less a party album than *Zombie* or *Underdog*, the record places more potential youth group anthems (“Rejoice,” “Summertime”) alongside worship songs with a more vertical orientation (“Glory,” “Lift,” “Tremble”). But the album also starts strong with two tracks (“You Still Amaze Me,” “I’m Alive”) that deliver the dynamic high-energy fix the band’s fans crave. *Lift*’s first single “Beautiful” (built on a melodic line copped from Lou Reed’s “Walk on the Wild Side”) would likewise provide a ready-for-the-mosh-pit celebration of rockin’ ’n’ rollin’ for Jesus. “Ocean Floor” proclaims the removal of sin to the bottom of the sea.

As indicated, the later AA albums all offer a potpourri of styles, drawing from a variety of influences (country, blues, metal). But these are all filtered through a distinctive Audio Adrenaline blend of alternative rock and hip-hop. Almost every album features one or two power ballads (“Rest Easy,” “Lighthouse,” “Speak To Me”) as well as at least one pure pop song so catchy one might swear it was left over from the ’60s (“Good People,” “People Like Me,” “Ocean Floor”). And then there are the cover songs—dynamite versions of Edgar Winter’s “Free Ride” and Pete Townsend’s “Let My Love Open the Door,” always performed better than the originals. Still, the core of each album consists of songs like “Beautiful,” “Blitz,” “Chevette,” “Get Down,” “Secret,” and “Some Kind of Zombie”: funky tunes that might remind one of the Red Hot Chili Peppers covering Three Dog Night but don’t really sound like *anything* that anyone is likely to have heard before.

Audio Adrenaline also owes its success to relentless touring and to fulfilling on stage the promise of vigor and stamina that their name implies. They deliver a basic garage band show dressed up with all the sound, lighting, and stage effects that one would expect from a big-name general market act. Comic relief often arrives in the form of ludicrous covers: a barely recognizable, thrasher version of the Sunday school classic, “If You’re Happy and You Know It”; a frighteningly precise reading of the Veggie Tales’ “Hairbrush Song.”

Diverse ventures have increased the group’s profile. Members of the band coauthored the book *Some Kind of Journey: On*

the *Road with Audio Adrenaline*. Herdman, McGinniss, and Stuart founded a recording company, Flicker Records, and signed **Riley Armstrong** as its debut artist. The band also sponsors a race car driven by Nashville driver “Barn” Dixon. The group describes its recording and performing as a ministry, focused primarily on communicating within the Christian subculture rather than (primarily) on converting outsiders. “Blitz” is about a road trip taken by “fourteen kids in an old church van.” “Never Gonna Be As Big As Jesus” is the group’s response to John Lennon’s infamous comment about the Beatles. “Chevette” is the musings of a preacher’s kid (Stuart) who understands his father’s purchase of a not-so-impressive new car in light of commitments to more important matters. “Hands and Feet” (from *Underdog*) is a prayer to be used by God in doing Christ’s work (“Let me be your hands / Let me be your feet”). “Man of God” (from *Bloom*) offers the grateful confession of one who realizes that *sometimes* he is the person God wants him to be. Devotion to boldness is a recurring theme in AA’s lyrics and interviews. “Christian music is offensive to most of the world,” Stuart told *Details* magazine in 1996. Blair agreed: “Christianity is one of the few things it’s okay to be bigoted against. . . . We *want* to be known as a Christian band.”

For trivia buffs: Stuart is married to the sister of **Toby McKeehan** of **DC Talk**.

Christian radio hits: “Who Do You Love” (# 13 in 1992); “Audio World” (# 16 in 1993); “My World View” (# 3 in 1994); “Big House” (# 12 in 1994); “Can’t Take God Away” (# 12 in 1994); “Rest Easy” (# 10 in 1994); “A.K.A. Public School” (# 14 in 1995); “Never Gonna Be As Big As Jesus” (# 3 in 1996); “Walk on Water” (# 14 in 1996); “Good People” (# 3 in 1996); “Free Ride” (# 9 in 1997); “Man of God” (# 2 in 1997); “People Like Me” (# 2 in 1998); “God-Shaped Hole” (# 17 in 1998); “New Body” (# 11 in 1999); “Get Down” (# 1 for 4 weeks in 1999); “Good Life” (# 3 in 2000); “Hands and Feet” (# 1 for 2 weeks in 2000); “One Like You” (# 5 in 2001); “Beautiful” (# 1 for 6 weeks in 2001).

Dove Awards: 1998 Alternative/Modern Rock Song (“Some Kind of Zombie”); 2000 Rock Song (“Get Down”).

Audio Paradox

Josh Pyle, voc.; et al. 1999—*The Iniquity of Time* (Flaming Fish).

The heavy industrial rock band Audio Paradox plays hard gothic music similar to that of **Autovoice** or general market band Kraftwerk. The band is essentially a truncated version of the group **Spy Glass Blue** (minus Alan Aguirre). Before recording their own album, they also served as the backing band for **Eva O**. Their music displays a somewhat lighter touch than most industrial rock, including moments of humor or at least sarcasm in songs like “Heart-Burning Transplant” and “Prosperkiller.” A few lines from the latter tune also reveal their penchant for spiritual warfare: “You foul, rotten stinkin’ devil /

I’m gonna beat you up, you devil / I’m gonna cut you up in the name of Jesus!”

Aunt Bettys

Andrew Carter, gtr.; Chuck Cummings, drums; Brian Doidge, bass; Michael Knott, voc., gtr. 1996—*Aunt Bettys* (Elektra); 1998—*Ford Supersonic* (Marathon).

www.michaelknott.com

One of the more controversial bands on the Christian scene, the Aunt Bettys were in one sense just a secular version of **LSU**. All band members had played with that quintessential alternative Christian group at one time or another. Chuck Cummings was also a member of **Common Bond** and **Dakota Motor Co**. Like **LSU**, however, the Aunt Bettys were essentially a projection of singer, writer, and sometimes solo-artist **Michael Knott**. Knott took up the project when the failure of his Blonde Vinyl label left him with enormous financial debts and he hoped that a release in the general market would help him to recoup those losses. Knott also admits, however, that he appreciated being able to record an album freed from the expectations of specifically Christian venues. “It felt good to cuss!” he told *True Tunes*, referring to the moment when he repeatedly yells “S**t!” on the Aunt Bettys’ remake of Knott’s “Rocket and a Bomb.” *True Tunes* actually refused to carry the album in their catalogue, noting it was the first time in their history to refuse a project by a known Christian artist.

The Aunt Bettys enjoyed a fair amount of success in the general market, touring with such acts as Fastball and the Kenny Wayne Shepard Band. Notably, Knott never tried to justify his worldly side project as anything other than just that. He did not view the Aunt Bettys as a means for sneaking into the general market so that he could deliver the Christian goods later. He did not explicate the group’s function in terms of ministry at all. It was just a fun experiment and a way to make some money. While Knott did not think that anything on the Aunt Bettys albums (or in their concerts) compromised his convictions as a Christian, he was forthright about saying the records were not Christian albums and should not be marketed through Christian stores. At the same time, Knott appeared to many (though he denies this) to have gone out of his way to offend the pious. The debut album’s opening song and first single was actually called “Jesus.” It presented the curious prayer of a drunk loser (“Come on, Jesus, give me one more drink . . .”). The CD’s accompanying cover art depicted a stained-glass Jesus tending bar. But if Christians suspected Knott of ridiculing their Lord and Savior, the secular press tended to view the same song as “reverent” and “spiritual.”

The mixed motives of catharsis and commercialism combined to make the Aunt Bettys’ debut album an appealing

slice of rock and roll. Musically, the group displays the sort of punk Americana sound of bands like Cracker, Spacehog, or Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers. Lyrically, the songs describe the lives of various outlandish characters Knott has met in Los Angeles. Knott claims the songs are at least based on true stories and the album is loosely structured as a tour of a seedy apartment building where all these folk supposedly live. “Lush” tells of a tattooed woman who seduces a man into coming back to her room, then ties him up and beats him; “Feel” presents an obsessed man who considers a sex change because he is in love with a woman who is a lesbian; “Star Baby” describes a woman convinced of the reality of alien abductions; “Kitty Courtesy” (a remake of an **LSU** song) portrays an even scarier woman, suspected of cannibalizing her late husband. Those looking for messages do not find the Bettys have much to offer, though some songs do convey an undercurrent of antidrug sentiment (“Addict”; “Little Fighter”). Others evince Knott’s trademark perception into the human psyche. For instance, one verse of “Double” (another old **LSU** tune) tells, from a man’s perspective, what happens when he and his wife learn their minister is getting a divorce. The wife’s reaction to this news is not what the man would have expected: she is not concerned about what this will mean for the pastor, or for his wife, or for their children, or for the congregation; instead, she asks, if “*his* marriage is over . . . how will *ours* survive?”

Such moments give any listener pause. But the overall mood of the Aunt Bettys’ first album is no more (or less) than a roller-coaster ride through the traditional three-tiered theme park of sex, drugs, and rock and roll. With regard to the latter, “Skinny-Bones Jones” takes a poke at aging dinosaur bands (Knott explains it as “a little broke artist making fun of the Rolling Stones”), and the closing song presents “Rock and Roll” as the solution to an otherwise humdrum life: the verses present a litany of trials (you’ve got this problem, I’ve got that one), each leading to the refrain “Let’s rock and roll.” It’s sort of a secular take on the old Jesus people slogan, “Praise the Lord (Anyway)!”

The second Aunty Bettys album is actually a collection of demos, outtakes, and live tracks: leftovers to provide fans of the first record with a second helping. *Ford Supersonic* contains less material that would be controversial for Christian audiences. Several of the songs are known to **Michael Knott** fans through other outlets: “Rock Stars on H” (in studio and live versions here) is an **LSU** song. “Getting Normal” and “Rikki Racer” are Knott songs that were performed by other artists on the eclectic **Browbeats** project. Another standout track, “Movie Star,” has a more pop sound than most of the Bettys’ work.

For trivia buffs: The Aunt Bettys originally organized and toured under the name Aunt Betty’s Ford, but had to shorten

their name under threat of lawsuits from both an unamused Ford Motor Co. and an equally uptight Betty Ford Clinic.

Aurora

Lauren Smith, voc.; Rachel Smith, voc.; Raquel Smith, voc. 2000—*Aurora* (Red Hill); 2001—*Bigger Than Us* (Pamplin).

Aurora is a sister act intended to offer a Christian alternative to the girl-power music that was aimed at preteens and early teens around the turn of the millennium (cf. **ShineMK**, **V*enna**, **Whisper Loud**, **Zoe Girl**). At the time of their debut, Lauren Smith was twenty-one and her twin sisters Rachel and Raquel were twenty. The three young women were raised in a Christian home in Georgia, and they say they hope their music will enable younger women to deal with the temptations and difficulties of growing up in a non-Christian world. The sisters have been singing harmonies together since childhood and first learned synchronized choreography when they were all members of the same cheerleading squad. The first two songs on their self-titled album were produced by **John** and **Dino Elefante** and are its strongest tracks: “Out of This World” sounds very much like a Britney Spears song, and the Latin-inflected “Loving Me Like You Do” sounds quite a bit like Jennifer Lopez. Tony Palacios of **Guardian** plays guitar on the record. Jeff Deyo of **Sonicflood** adds guest vocals to the worshipful “Before the Throne.” The album’s closing song “Different Drum” (not a Linda Ronstadt cover) seems to sum up its central theme: in Rachel’s words, “kids can stay away from some of the things their friends may be doing and still have fun.” *Bigger Than Us* continues to focus the group mainly on their target teen-pop audience but allows for a little more stylistic diversity. On “Just the Way You Are” (not a Billy Joel song) and “Go On,” they try out a more urban style. “Rekindle the Flame” is a worship song.

Christian radio hits: “A World with You” (# 12 in 2001).

John Austin

1992—*The Embarrassing Young* (Glasshouse); 1994—*Authorized Unauthorized Bootleg* (independent); 1996—*Byzantium*; 1998—*If I Was a Latin King* (Weatherwane).

John Austin is a singer/songwriter in the mold of John Hiatt or Jackson Browne. He has won praise (and assistance) from many Christian artists who have enjoyed more commercial success than has come to him. A minister’s son who attended Moody Bible Institute, Austin honed his craft singing in Chicago subways for change tossed by appreciative passersby. Somehow, a tape made it into the hands of Christian music legend **Mark Heard**, who produced Austin’s first album. The title track from that record offers social commentary on a society that “doesn’t believe in God or heaven, and has no room for

the sick and the meek.” Critics regarded the project as promising, but then in one year, Heard died, Austin’s label went bankrupt, and the uninsured singer was assaulted by a gang of Hispanics in Chicago, leaving him with a badly broken arm and thousands of dollars in unpaid medical bills.

It was five years before he could produce another album for a major label. During the interim, however, Austin turned out two disparate private releases, both produced by Newton Carter of the **Vigilantes of Love**. The appropriately titled *Unauthorized Unauthorized Bootleg* is unplugged: Austin’s voice, an acoustic guitar, and a harmonica are the only sounds to be heard on a batch of original songs, plus one cover of Heard’s “Go Ask the Dead Man.” *Byzantium* has a much more electric sound, with Austin fronting a full band made up of guests from the **Vigilantes**, Better Than Ezra, and Billy Pilgrim. The album takes its name from the Christian empire that succeeded Rome; to Austin, this is a metaphor for “a place to go after your whole world crumbles.” A standout song is “Leave the Light On,” about finding one’s way in darkness.

If I Was a Latin King was produced by Bill Campbell of **The Throes and Poole**. The title reveals Austin to be struggling with the psychological aftermath of his assault (the Latin Kings are a street gang in Chicago) but also references his new Hispanic sound, replete with flamenco guitar, maracas, and cymbals. Overall, the theme of the album is one of hope and forgiveness, though numerous songs address harsh realities of modern life; the title track sets the tone with its reference to a world “where the violent and the beautiful go running hand in hand.” The song “Be True To Your School” takes off on the old Beach Boys tune with creepy reference to school shootings. The most noticed song on the album has been “In Your Mama’s Dreamz,” a catchy tune (with Austin’s wife Erin Echo sharing the vocals) about poverty, urban violence, teenage pregnancy, and the prayers that mothers say for their children.

Matt Auten

1995—*Where Loss and Gain Began* (independent); 2000—*New Found Land* (Silent Planet).

www.silentplanetrecords.com

Matt Auten is an unabashed folksinger, influenced by such artists as Joni Mitchell and **David Wilcox**. His music focuses on acoustic instrumentation, especially guitar. *New Found Land* (produced by **Tim Miner**) contains three instrumentals along with eleven vocal tracks. In his songwriting, Auten strives for what he calls “poetic storytelling” and “a touch of melancholy, but with a lyric that points toward hope.” His style and lyrics have been compared to those of **Fernando Ortega** and **Pierce Pettis**, with whom he has toured.

Autovoice

Stephen Shoe, voc., elec.; Johnny Space-Echo, voc., elec. 1995—*00000011* (Mere); 1997—*A Living Death* (Flaming Fish).

www.yesic.com/~johnnys/autovoice

The Canadian industrial band Autovoice produces gothic electronic music that seeks to mimic the mechanical sounds of industry. Comparable groups in the general market would be Kraftwerk or Bauhaus, or, in the Christian market, early **Deitiphobia**. The music consists of fully manipulated and synthesized sounds, laced with ample feedback and distortion. Thus, the band opts for the keyboard-only type of industrial music that was favored by the genre’s early pioneers, as opposed to the guitar-laced sounds employed by later innovators. The vocals are not understandable, but lyrics can be obtained through the band’s website. Those who do obtain them will learn that they have been listening to songs describing dehumanization, decrying inhumanity, and proclaiming the need for a transcendent relationship with God.

Tom Autry

1974—*Tom Autry* (StarSong); 1978—*Blood of the Lamb*; 1980—*Better Days*.

Tom Autry is best known as author of the country hit, “A Mama and a Papa,” first made popular by Ray Stevens. With a voice that has been compared to Richie Havens, he recorded early Christian albums of varied types. His first, abounding with pedal steel guitar (by **Al Perkins**), has a distinct country flavor. The second features keyboards and is more of a worship album. *Jesus Music* describes it as “art rock,” noting that songs like “Blood of the Lamb,” “I Want To Set You Free,” and the instrumental “Sacrifice” convey a moody atmospheric sound that prefigures what would later be called New Age music. *Better Days* tries for a soulful balance of styles, as Autry covers Bill Withers’ “Lean on Me” (with help from **Dallas Holm**) and **Mighty Clouds of Joy**’s “Master Plan.” After these three albums, Autry delved into the easy listening market, recording independent albums for private release. He refers to himself as “a psalmist and a musicianary” and he travels extensively, leading worship at Pentecostal revival meetings. His wife Janie Autry sometimes sings with him.

Avalon

Jody McBryer, voc.; Michael Passons, voc.; Janna Potter Long, voc.; Nikki Hassman, voc. (–1997) // Cheri Paliotta (+1997). 1996—*Avalon* (Sparrow); 1997—*A Maze of Grace*; 1999—*In a Different Light*; 2000—*Joy*; 2001—*Oxygen* (Word).

www.avalonlive.com

Formed in 1995, the pop madrigal choir known as Avalon (after a medieval metaphor for heaven) scored nine consecutive Number One singles in the adult contemporary Christian market in the first three years of their existence. The group was assembled by Norman Miller and corporate executives at Sparrow who hoped to create another **Point of Grace** or **4 Him** (or, more accurately, a blend of the two, with gender balance). An early version of the group with a somewhat different lineup toured with the 1995 Young Messiah musical production, but the four members who formed the original recording group all had history in contemporary Christian music. Jody McBray and Janna Potter had both been in **Truth**, Nikki Hassman had sung backup for **Clay Crosse**, and Michael Passons had performed as a praise and worship leader. Songwriters were recruited and a self-titled album was commissioned with veteran producer **Charlie Peacock** at the helm. Hassman left the group after the debut album to pursue a mainstream career; she placed a song called “Any Lucky Penny” on the soundtrack for the TV series *Dawson’s Creek* and signed a seven-album contract with Sony.

The first four tracks on *Avalon* received the most airplay, but the record’s most impressive songs may be its final three: an a capella version of the hymn “My Jesus I Love Thee”; “Saviour Love,” cowritten by group members; and a rendition of the **Andraé Crouch** song “Jesus is Lord.” Also remarkable is “Give It Up,” another song cowritten by group members that summons its listeners to give their lives as a sacrifice to Christ. *A Maze of Grace* opens with “Testify To Love,” an anthemic number that features overlapping vocals and a determined melody line. The song would prove to be the longest running hit single of the decade on Christian adult contemporary charts. In general, Avalon’s sophomore project features more up-tempo songs than the first record, successfully matching the vocal harmonies with dance music. The title track and a turbo-charged “Speed of Light” exemplify this approach best, though, again, the laid-back and beautiful “Adonai” is perhaps the album’s showstopper. A hit titled “Knockin’ on Heaven’s Door” (not the **Bob Dylan** song) urges the persistence of prayer. The title of the third album, *In a Different Light*, seems to suggest a change of direction, but that is misleading. In spite of a new producer (**Brown Bannister**), the group continues to churn out uplifting pop music (“Take You at Your Word”) and tender worship songs (“I’m Speechless,” “Let Your Love”) just like those on the first two projects. The overall focus of the album is dependence upon God who remains ever faithful (“Can’t Live a Day,” “Always Has, Always Will”). The first hit from the album, “In Not Of” describes the relationship of Christians to an as-yet-unredeemed world. “Can’t Live a Day” almost rivaled “Testify To Love” in radio popularity. “Always Has, Always Will” has an appealing, uncharacteristic style—

cowritten by **Toby McKeehan** of **DC Talk**, it almost sounds like a *Jesus Freak* outtake. After recording a Christmas album (*Joy*), Avalon came back with *Oxygen*, which was billed as a more musically progressive project. Indeed, *Oxygen* opens with a rock track (“Wonder Why”), and “Make It Last Forever” features some sizzling guitar work, but most of the project continues in a familiar vein guaranteed to please longtime fans without attracting many new ones. The clear standout song is “The Glory,” a majestic choral number with lyrics celebrating Christ’s sacrifice. The title track is addressed to God (“You are my oxygen”) and was cowritten for the group by Richard Page of **Mr. Mister**.

CCM magazine describes Avalon as “hitting the bullseye on what is currently popular in the genre: straightforward, conclusive lyrics and music that is brimming with vim, vigor, and vitality.” Naysayers complain that such an overt appeal to a targeted audience exemplifies “corporate rock” and belies the creativity and authenticity that should be integral to popular music. Peacock defends Avalon as “building on the foundation of what vocal groups have been in the past.” Notably, gospel music has a long tradition of assembled vocal groups (**The Imperials**, **Truth**), as does mainstream rock (from The Four Seasons and The Supremes to the Backstreet Boys and the Spice Girls).

For trivia buffs: Avalon’s Janna Potter is married to Christian singer **Greg Long**.

Christian radio hits: “Give It Up” (# 13 in 1996); “This Love” (# 14 in 1997); “Testify To Love” (# 7 in 1998); “Knockin’ on Heaven’s Door” (# 15 in 1998); “In Not Of” (# 4 in 1999); “Take You at Your Word” (# 10 in 1999); “Always Have, Always Will” (# 5 in 2000); “Fly To You” (# 17 in 2000); “Make It Last Forever” (# 1 for 2 weeks in 2001); “Wonder Why” (# 11 in 2001).

Dove Awards: 1998 New Artist; 1999 Inspirational Song (“Adonai”); 1999 Pop/Contemporary Song (“Testify To Love”).

AVB (a.k.a. Acappella Vocal Band)

Wes McKinzie (–1996); Terry Cheatham (–1991); Danny Elliott (–1991); Jay Smith (–1991); Bret Testerman (–1991) // Max Plaster (+ 1991, –1996); George Gee (+ 1991, –1992); Jarel Smith (+ 1991, –1992); John Green (+ 1992, –1996); Brishan Hatcher (+ 1992, –1999); Brian Randolph (+ 1992, –1993); Steve Reischl (+ 1993, –1996); Josh Harrison (+ 1996, –1999); Aaron Herman (+ 1996, –1999); Andrew McNeil (+ 1996, –1999); Chris Bahr (+ 1999); Tony Brown (+ 1999); Todd Dunaway (+ 1999); Chris Lindsey (+ 1999); Jeremy Swindle (+ 1999). 1990—*Song in My Soul* (Acappella Company); 1991—*What’s Your Tag Say?*; 1992—*Celebrate and Party*; 1993—*U and Me and God Make 5*; 1994—*Caminando en la Luz*; 1995—*The Road*; 1996—*Way of Life*; 1999—*Real*.

www.acappella.org

AVB developed as a spin-off of **Acappella** when it was decided that the latter group would pursue more traditional adult-oriented material and the former would stake out a claim on the younger audience. The separate band formed in 1988, some years before the appearance of Boyz II Men, when appealing to youth with a capella singing seemed to be a radical idea. The group's producer is Keith Lancaster, who is also responsible for the adult group's sound. Denominationally, AVB has its background in a branch of the Church of Christ that forbids the use of musical instruments in churches. McKinzie once explained in an interview that group members do not necessarily share this conviction, but their heritage has instilled in them a rich appreciation (and talent) for a capella singing. AVB's mission statement describes the group as "dedicated to stirring young people to a godly commitment, through cutting-edge vocal music."

Musically, AVB has not usually favored the soulful balladry associated with Boyz II Men but has opted for faster-paced, more rhythmic songs. Incorporation of jazz stylings has made comparisons to **Take 6** inevitable. On their early albums, the tendency was toward novelty: numerous short choruses often performed with a touch of humor. This was augmented in concert performances where it was revealed that the numerous electronic and percussive sounds heard accompanying the singers were actually produced anatomically. The title track to *What's Your Tag Say?* and "It's Not Enough" from the same album display rap/hip-hop underpinnings reminiscent of Tony! Tone! Toni! These elements develop further on *Celebrate and Party*, as the racially integrated group embraces more of a doo-wop sound while still incorporating hip-hop rhythms. *The Road* is essentially a retrospective of previously recorded material, except that all songs were re-recorded in updated versions. One of these was their crowd-pleasing version of "Kyrie," a Number One general market hit for **Mr. Mister** in 1985.

Christian radio hits: "Kyrie" (# 23 in 1994).

The Awakening

Andrew Horrocks, gtr.; Allan Powell, bass; Mike Powell, drums; Ian Tanner, voc., kybrd. 1986—*Two Worlds* (independent); 1987—*Sanctified* (Reunion); 1988—*Into Thy Hands*.

Formed in 1985, the Canadian band The Awakening fashioned themselves as a Christian version of Yes, with some influence perhaps from Peter Gabriel-led Genesis. Tanner and Horrocks went on to form **One Hundred Days**. The Awakening produced progressive, synthesizer-heavy rock that aimed for transcendence. *Sanctified* mainly repeats songs from the custom debut, with two additions ("My Only Hope," "Distant Light"), which exhibit a marked improvement over the other material in terms of technical quality or commercial polish.

The Awakening actually covered Chris Squire's "Onward" on their final album, and the song "Don't Wait for Me" could have passed for an outtake from Yes's *90125*. Despite the limitations inherent in such imitative efforts, the group avoided the bombastic pretentiousness of their secular forebears and thus often produced accessible pop-oriented songs. They were also frequently compared to **Elim Hall** (in part due to a Canadian connection).

Note: a South African Christian band also called The Awakening has released at least three independent albums of brooding, gothic music similar in sound to **Dead Artist Syndrome** or **Type O Negative**: *Risen*, which features a cover of Simon and Garfunkel's "Sounds of Silence"; *Request*, which similarly covers Men Without Hats' "Safety Dance"; and *Ethereal Menace*.

Christian radio hits: "Give It Up" (# 13 in 1996); "This Love" (# 14 in 1997).

Bob Ayala

1976—*Joy by Surprise* (Pure Joy); 1978—*Wood between the Worlds* (Myrrh); 1980—*Journey*; 1985—*Rescued* (Pretty Good).

A native of Los Angeles and a child of the Jesus movement, Bob Ayala was voted "Best New Artist of the Year" by readers of *CCM* magazine in 1976. Ayala actually began his music ministry in 1969 by performing regularly at a famous Christian coffeehouse in Los Angeles called the Salt Company. He later became involved with Texas-based Last Days Ministries after the death of that organization's founder, **Keith Green**, performing Keith Green Memorial concerts and, taking up one of LDM's pet-concerns, antiabortion rallies. In the '90s, Ayala signed on as a songwriter with Integrity Music. Ayala is blind as a result of a genetic eye disease (retinitis pigmentosa). Ayala began his Christian music ministry in 1969 (long before his first album), and during the days of the Jesus movement, he toured constantly with his wife Pam, who was a strong partner in his ministry. At that time, he was noted for being one of the only short-haired clean-shaven Christian singers in an otherwise hippie environment. He was also known for his sense of humor, though most of his songs are in a serious vein. Ayala's musical style is best described as pastoral folk in the tradition of Dan Fogelberg and Harry Chapin; he has also been compared to Jose Feliciano. His first album, *Joy by Surprise*, was recorded with Buddy King at the latter's Huntington Beach house. It takes its title from the autobiography of C. S. Lewis, a well-spring of inspiration whose works Ayala would often tap (cf. "That Hideous Strength," on *Wood between the Worlds*). The album *Rescued* features guitar work by Hadley Hockensmith and saxophone by Justo Almario, both of **Koinonia**.

Ayala's theological maturity shows on songs like "Positive Confessions," which counters prosperity gospel teachings, and

his sensitivity comes through on “Dear God,” which suggests a priority of family time over church activities. Ayala wrote a number of songs that seem directed to individuals (“Anna,” “Vanya,” “Valerie,” “Pamela,” “Heidi”). In “Pamela,” he expresses this touching thought: “God could work a miracle and make me see / But you know, if God would give me just one more miracle / I’d pray that God would give me a love as deep as yours.”

Azitis

Don Lower, voc.; bass; Steve Nelson, voc., drums; Dennis Sullivan, kybrd.; Michael Welch, gtr., flute. 1970—*Help* (Elco).

www.geocities.com/Area51/Keep/3879/AZITIS.htm

Regarded by some as the world’s first Christian rock band, Azitis produced one album of psychedelic art rock similar in sound to such mainstream artists as Fever Tree or the 13th Floor Elevators. The group preferred to call their music metaphysical rock. Founded by the rhythm section of Don Lower

and Steve Nelson, the band first went by the name Help and released a single under that name with Capitol Records (“Questions Why” and “Life Worth Living”). When they signed with Elco, they changed their name to Azitis (supposedly from the phrase “on earth *azitis* in heaven”) and used *Help* as the name of the album instead. That record is something of a rock opera, telling the story of Creation to Fall to Redemption to Judgment in songs that are meant to flow continuously one to the other. Vocals are subdued, with the accent on swirling organ sounds reminiscent of Iron Butterfly’s “In-a-Gadda-Da-Vida.” More ecumenical than most Christian musical groups, Azitis said their message was, “all religions give us hope and faith in our fellow man.” Nevertheless, the album cover depicts a large cross emerging out of a globe, symbolizing “the invention of Christian faith, overshadowing the other philosophies of mankind.” A second rock-opera by Azitis, *Window into It*, was performed at the University of Sacramento in 1975 and recorded but never released. In 2000, Lower said it dealt with “a blending of all religions” and may finally become available.