

Blackout – Steffany Gretzinger: Review



Music review by Luchae

Williams

Dynamic songstress, Steffany Gretzinger, of Bethel Music fame, released her second studio album in March 2018. Following her critically acclaimed debut offering, *The Undoing*, Gretzinger shows us a different layer to her worship in this latest album titled *Blackout*.

One would expect a more corporate worship album from the singer/songwriter, who is well known for stellar worship songs such as *King of My Heart* and Bethel fave, *You Know Me*. But *Blackout* has been described as “not your typical worship album” by music critics, and offers listeners a more personal, intimate time in the presence of God, with gentle worship, coaxing vocals and music arrangements that are both interesting and not distracting.

Blackout

“It’s about being able to joyfully dance as tears stream down your face, knowing that life comes through learning to grieve and celebrate at the same time,” said Gretzinger, in an interview. This is how the title track was born, out of a place of self-discovery and learning to navigate through the darkness, towards God’s undeniable light.

“You can’t turn out a light shining from the inside. We’re living in a blackout. The day is dark, but the light shines the brightest in the darkness. If there was ever a time for us to shine, it’s now. If we’re really going to be The Light Of The World, we have to know who we are in God,” shared Gretzinger. “It is possible to learn to dance while the tears stream down our faces, to stay connected to the One who made us. If we understand that we are made of light, then we can’t be threatened with darkness.”

The title track, **Blackout**, is actually the album closer, surprisingly. The music composition is immediately attractive, with an intensity that makes you sit up and listen. Definitely the most upbeat song on the album, it speaks about shining your light with a defiant hook that says: “you can’t turn out a light shining from the inside!” I loved the style of this track... possibly a genre that Gretzinger should look into.

New sound

Opening track, **Save Me**, carries the same feel – that something new has been birthed in this songbird. I loved the fresh lyrical content, basically pointing out that Jesus is our super hero and that we cannot save ourselves. The musical composition of the track is best described as dramatic, with synths and drums setting the scene.

Possibly my favorite song on the album is the moody track, **Dust**. The song has a pop feel to it and opens with lines that immediately impacted me: “I am dust, You are God/For I am breathless till You fill my lungs.” I really love the synthy pop feel of **Bright Ones** too. This song is through and through

a declaration, with lyrics that say “We are Your bright ones/Lit up with Your love/Glowing in darkness/We shine for You.”

I was really moved by Gretzinger’s duet with worship leader, Bobby Strand in the song **Confident**. The track speaks about our faithful God and paints a picture of His dedication and love for us. I especially enjoyed the bridge and found myself singing the catchy melody over and over: “I won’t win this battle with the strength in my own hands/You’re the mountain-mover and only You can!” Yes and amen!

Other tender moments on the album include the intriguing **Oxygen** and the heart wrenching piano driven ballad, **Sing Me Back Home**. Written for the prodigal sons, the song speaks about losing direction and being able to worship your way back into His arms. Such a beautiful song.

I appreciated the addition of one of Gretzinger’s infamous spontaneous worship moments, in the track **I Was Made For This**. The raw recording is a transparent reflection of this singer’s heart for God and it is such a gift to have on this album.

Steffany Gretzinger is an anointed songwriter who has the uncanny ability of being able to articulate those “every day moments” one has with God. **Blackout** is definitely an intimate worship album, filled with poignant lyrics and incredible music production that makes it worth the purchase. If you’re looking for songs to inspire your Christian walk, or for intimate worship that will ease you into a deeper moment with Holy Spirit, then this one is for you.

Cory Asbury – Reckless Love: Review



Music review by Luchae

Williams

American Christian singer and songwriter, Cory Asbury, released his second solo studio album in January 2018. Titled **Reckless Love**, the album is the worship leader's first full-length release with new label, Bethel Music.

The critically-acclaimed title song was released by Bethel Music in October 2017, quickly growing in popularity. The track was already a top-selling Christian song on iTunes, prior to the album's release date, and has been featured on set lists and in churches around the world, including Darlene Zschech's HopeUC church.

The song also struck a chord with famous Christian crooner, Michael W Smith, who has recorded it for his forthcoming live worship album. *Reckless Love* debuted at No 1 on Billboard's Christian Albums chart in the United States, marking the

singer's first appearance on the highly sought-after chart.

The track, ***Reckless Love***, is everything you would expect to find in a popular worship song: poetic, emotive lyric that transports the listener to a place of reverence and worship, and a catchy melody line and hook that will stick with you.

Reminiscent of Chris Tomlin's *Good Good Father*, the song paints a picture of a father yearning after his children. Some may not agree with the use of the word "reckless" in the song, but Asbury explains: "When I use the phrase, 'the reckless love of God', I'm not saying that God Himself is reckless. I am, however, saying that the way He loves, is in many regards, quite so. What I mean is this: He is utterly unconcerned with the consequences of His actions with regards to His own safety, comfort, and well-being. His love isn't crafty or slick. It's not cunning or shrewd. In fact, all things considered, it's quite childlike, and might I even suggest, sometimes downright ridiculous.

"His love bankrupted heaven for you. His love doesn't consider Himself first. His love isn't selfish or self-serving. He doesn't wonder what He'll gain or lose by putting Himself out there. He simply gives Himself away on the off-chance that one of us might look back at Him and offer ourselves in return."

From boyhood to manhood

Asbury describes the album as one that documents his journey from boyhood to manhood to child of God. Sharing on the Bethel Music Instagram page, he says: "On the journey from boyhood to manhood there were a million cracks in the road. But somehow the grace of God swooped in with wings otherworldly and carried me safely over each one. And finally, those mighty wings set me down in a broad place. Now I'm a father to my own little boy. And somehow, in so becoming, I'm a little child again. Fully free and fully alive in my Father's eyes. The brokenness didn't break me.

“No, we rewrote the story in crimson ink. And I dance again like a little boy. Nothing between us. Innocent and free just like You always wanted. And I realize I’ve always been the dream of Your heart. A son.”

The opening song is preceded by the soulful ***Water and Dust***, complete with an acoustic flavour and almost ethereal effects. This song showcases the singer’s smooth vocal perfectly, as he sings “Gently Your voice like a calming embrace calls me from out of the noise/You whisper to me, ‘Child, forget not your dreams’ as we lie awake in the dark/just don’t lose heart.”

Most of the songs on the album carry the same sentiment. They are both gentle and powerful, creating a moment of intimacy for the listener to reflect on the beauty and majesty of God. You’ll find this on songs such as ***You Won’t Let Go*** and ***Endless Love***.

Passion song, ***Death Where Is Your Sting***, has a powerful Easter theme, speaking about the work of Christ on the cross. My favorite part is the bridge, where Asbury’s resounding vocal declares: “No weapon formed against us will prosper/The gates of hell won’t stand/Your Church will rise from glory to glory/in the name of Jesus!”

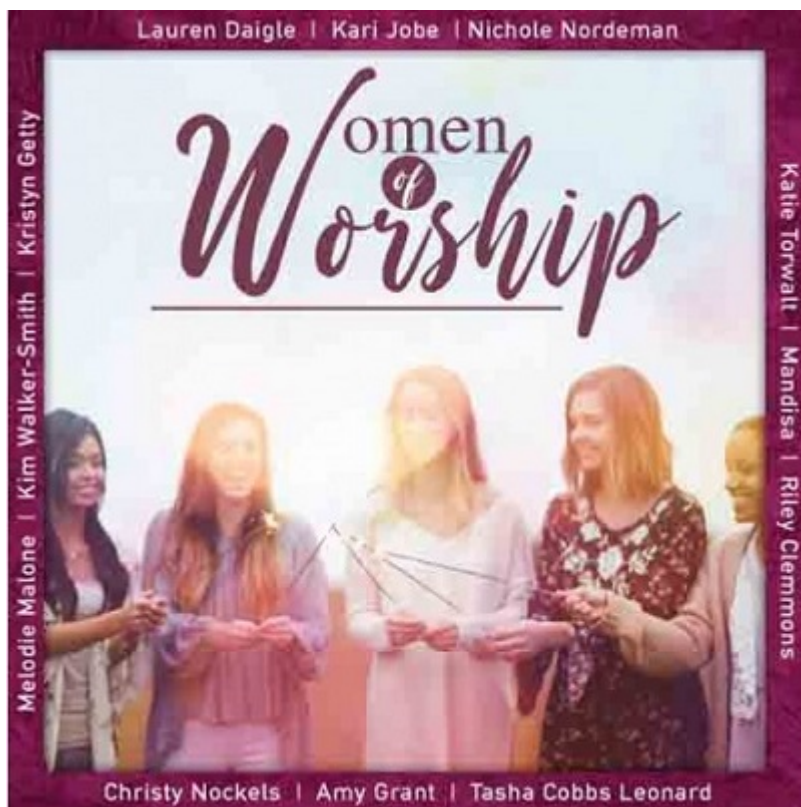
The more upbeat songs on the album include the acoustic driven ***Garments*** and the catchy ***Only Takes a Moment*** – a mid tempo praise song with a soulful edge.

Album closer, ***Endless Alleluia***, does such a great job at beautifully completing the journey. The song features Asbury’s soulfully sweet vocal and a breathtakingly beautiful soundtrack complete with strings and just the right amount of effects. The song’s chorus says: “Let our voices rise/All creation cries/Singing out an endless alleluia/From this moment on/Join with Heaven’s song/Singing out an endless alleluia!

Cory Asbury fans will be pleased with such a phenomenal

offering. Asbury literally wears his heart on his sleeve on this beautifully-penned album, with songs that point the listener back to God. If you're not familiar with Asbury, his worship or his musicianship, give this one a go, you will not regret it.

Women of Worship compilation: Review



Music Review by Luchae

Williams

With Mother's Day quickly approaching, I love intentional gift giving. The 2018 **Women of Worship** compilation album, for example, would make for a great spoil! With songs that both inspire you and challenge you to leave your cares at the feet of Jesus, listeners are encouraged to experience the rest and

peace that only the presence of God can bring.

The collection features 14 powerhouse tracks from some of today's most popular female worship leaders such as Natalie Grant, Tasha Cobbs Leonard and Kim Walker Smith. I appreciate that every singer featured is renowned for both her gifting and the presence of God that she carries.

Passion Conference stalwart Christy Nockels opens with her catchy anthem, ***Marvelous Light*** from her album *Life Light Up*.

The vibey praise song is preceded by worship music darling Kari Jobe's midtempo track from her *Majestic* album, titled ***Keeper of My Heart***. Jobe is featured twice on this compilation and I quite enjoyed her worship track, ***Speak To Me***, too. The song changes the atmosphere and draws your attention to Holy Spirit, sharpening your ear as you intentionally build up your faith to hear from Him.

Other popular worship artists featured are Mandisa with her dance track, ***Overcomer*** and Dove award winner Lauren Daigle, with her catchy pop jam, ***Trust in You***.

If deep worship is more your thing, you'll be excited to learn that vocal power house Tasha Cobbs Leonard's ***Fill Me Up (Live)*** is also featured on the album. Leonard released this version on her 2015 album *One Place Live*, and it has since grown in popularity.

Amy Grant's ***Carry You*** is also featured, as well as two tracks from the soulful Nichole Nordeman. Nordeman's ***Slow Down*** is the perfect Mother's Day theme song. The track is an ode to her children, and paints the picture of a mother watching her babies grow up.

An exciting addition to the compilation is up-and-coming artist Riley Clemmon's debut hit single, ***Broken Prayers***. With a pop element, rich vocal and clever lyric, the song speaks about our God of redemption, who sees the beauty in our scars:

“When I’m hurt, at my worst/You meet me there/Cause you see the beauty/In my broken prayers.”

All in all, I would rate the *Women of Worship* compilation a thoughtful and poignant addition to any Mother’s Day spoil. With chart-topping songs that feature powerful messages and beautiful reflections of worship, I give it a thumbs up!

Top 25 Gospel Praise Songs: Decades



A music review by Luchae Williams

Maranatha! Music released their latest instalment in the Top 25 album collections and probably one of my favorites to date: ***Top 25 Gospel Praise Songs Decades***. The 2-CD set is a compilation of Maranatha! Music’s best Gospel praise and

worship songs, past and present. Featuring music from legends such as Johnathan Butler, Bishop Joseph Garlington and Morris Chapman, the collection hosts a plethora of Gospel music's finest moments in worship, performed by voices of today.

The jazz infused ***Brand New Day*** by South African crooner, Johnathan Butler, kicks the album off. With a catchy rhythm and encouraging lyric, the track speaks about forgetting all your troubles and leaning on the Lord.

Butler features quite a few times on Disc 1 of the compilation. One of my faves, from the local worship leader is the praise anthem, ***Gonna Lift You Up***. Everyone's favorite worship ballad, ***Falling In love with Jesus***, is also featured. Other Butler tracks included are worship songs ***I Love To Worship***, ***We Need You*** and ***Love Never Fails***.

If you enjoy sultry rhythm and blues, have a listen to the old school funky ***Let Me Be Like A Tree*** by Scott V Smith. The song speaks about Psalm 1:3; being planted by the rivers of waters, bringing forth fruit in due season. And if you're looking to go even further back into Christian music history, check out ***Pass Me Not***, which was originally arranged by Bishop Joseph Garlington. Complete with a church organ and a sing along quality, this melodic offering was originally released in 1985 but it certainly has not lost it's depth!

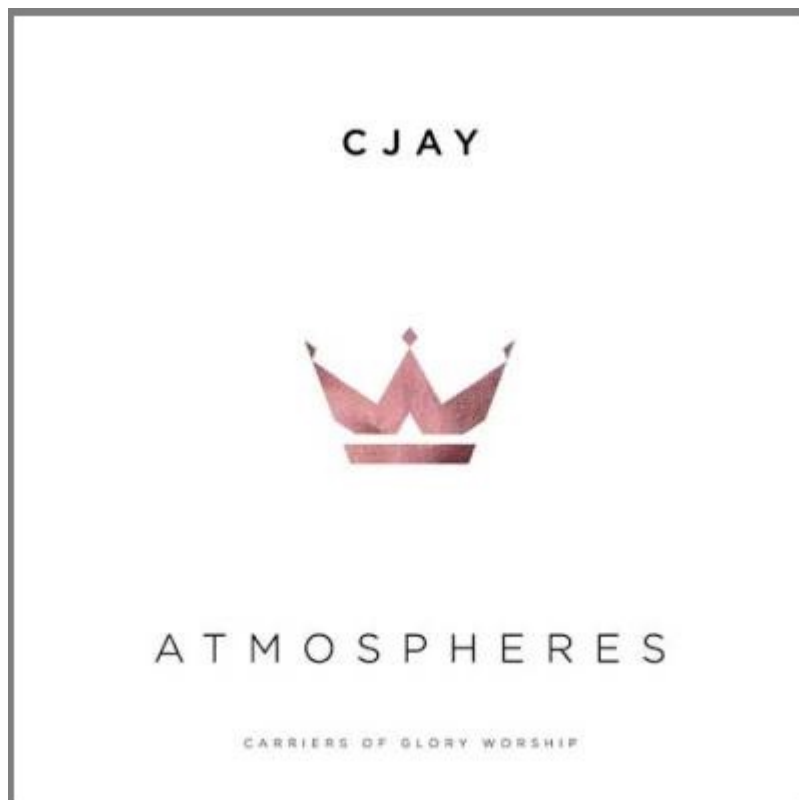
Christian music legend, Morris Chapman is also featured a few times on the collection with tracks ***The Family Prayer Song (As For Me And My House)***, ***The Reconciliation Song*** and ***Jesus Your Name***.

You might be familiar with Rick Found's upbeat offering, ***Lord, I Lift Your Name On High***. This golden oldie can be found on Disc 2 of the compilation. With a catchy hook and a verse that simply says "Lord I lift Your name on high/Lord I love to sing Your praises/I'm so glad You're in my life/I'm so glad You came to save us" it'll have you singing along in no time.

I quite enjoyed *Yes, We All Agree*, *Joy, Joy, Joy* and *He Knows My Name* by Gospel songwriting legend, Tommy Walker. Both have a choral element to it and are definite must listens.

If you're looking for a compilation album that has an old school flavour, power packed with Gospel songs that have carried a whole generation from glory to glory, do check out the Top 25 Gospel Praise Songs Decades collection. While the sound definitely steers away from the more contemporary Christian genre that this generation is currently consumed with, it definitely brings a breath of fresh air and a depth to your worship time. I thoroughly enjoyed it!

CJay – Atmospheres: Review



Music Review by Luchae

Williams

South African contemporary Gospel star, CJay Jansen, released

his dynamic new offering, ***Atmospheres***, in September 2017. The award-winning singer-songwriter, well-known for his success in the Christian hip-hop circles, dubs the new album as “a journey of the last five years”.

Better known for the mark he has made on the local Christian rap scene, Jansen explains that he did not expect to be singing on his new album.

“I remember sitting in a meeting where the man of God came to me and said: “The Lord has not just called you to rap, He has called you to sing. When I heard that I thought this man is crazy because you would never hear me singing!”

“So many times we get into a place where God is doing big things and everything is going so well and we forget to realise that with this God we move from glory to glory because God has more in store.”

Atmospheres

Atmospheres serves as a testimony of this, comprising 10 original songs, all featuring a crooning Jansen.

“This new music is so different to what I’ve done before, but it shows the journey and the growth as an artist and as a believer in our faith.”

Title track, ***Atmospheres***, shares the worship leader’s heart – to see the glory of God move among His people.

“Throughout my music career, my desire has always been for the presence of God to be felt, not just in my quiet time but in my music and when we perform it live.” He explained.

The overall sound of the album is evident from the get go. Opening track, ***Fall Afresh***, is an easy listen, with uncomplicated musical compositions and CJay’s pure vocal making it easy for the listener to sing along.

Fans of Rhema worship leader, Janine Price, will be pleased to

know that the songbird is featured on the album. Worship song, ***Higher Deeper***, was penned by both Price and Jansen and speaks about wanting to go deeper in the presence of God.

Price explains: “It really is a song that changes the atmosphere and creates a space for God’s glory to be manifested in your life.”

I appreciated the addition of mid-tempo track, ***Shake The Earth***. The song has a likeable melody, some cool music experimentation (which is welcomed after the heaviness of the first few tracks) and features a contemporary-sounding Jansen.

The rest of the album carries the same feel and theme as the first few songs – mellow, atmosphere-stirring worship with simple instrument arrangements and Jansen’s unobtrusive vocal.

Hip hop fans hoping for the rap-driven repertoire that CJay is better known for will be surprised to find not one rap song on this album. Those who prefer deep worship will find the change to be a pleasant one. ***Atmospheres*** clearly marks a turning point in CJay’s ministry and I’m excited to see what else God has in [store](#).

Casting Crowns – It’s Finally Christmas: Review



Music Review by Luchae

Williams

Contemporary Christian music collective Casting Crowns released their freshly recorded festive album, ***It's Finally Christmas***, in October 2017. Headed by worship leader, and former youth pastor, Mark Hall, the seven piece ensemble have added their own mix of original songs and Christmas classics to this six-track EP.

Album opener, ***Gloria/Angels We Have Heard on High*** is a contemporary retake of the age-old festive song, complete with new verses, a fresh melody and a really great vocal display from Hall.

Casting Crowns followers will find familiarity in the country-tinged ballad, ***It's Finally Christmas***. The song speaks about all the comforts and joys of Christmas time and invites the listener into an almost nostalgic, sentimental moment.

Another sweet moment on the EP is found in the emotive ***Somewhere in Your Silent Night***. The song is a beautiful composition speaking about the hope and peace that the birth

of Christ brings. Halls haunting vocal delivers the powerful message, in the bridge: “Emmanuel will meet you where you are/He knows your hurt /He knows your name /and you’re the very reason that He came.”

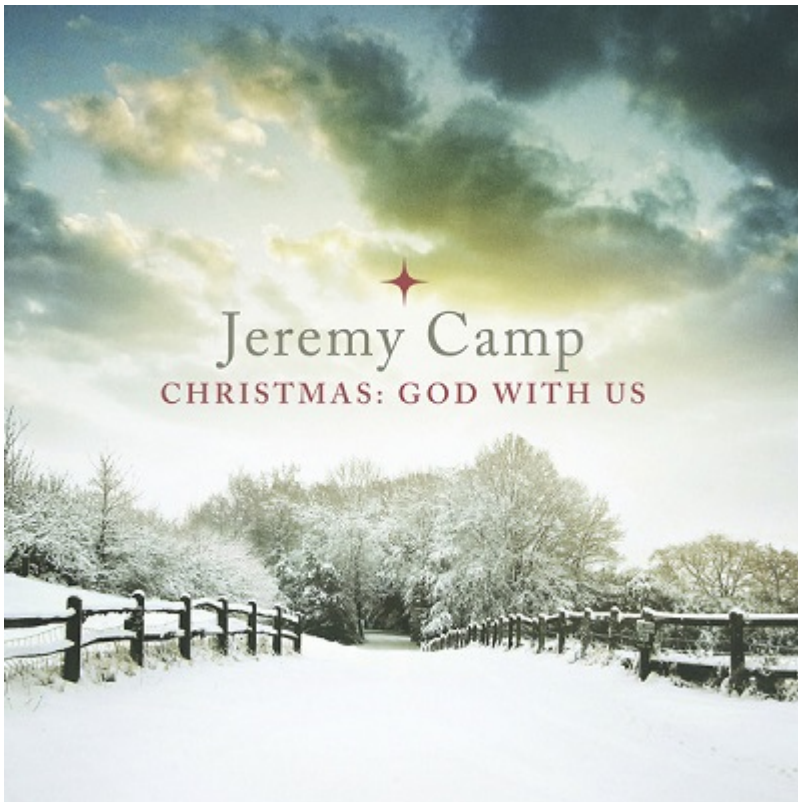
Out of all the original tracks, on the album, my favorite has to be the the duet with singer and songwriter, Matt Maher. Called ***Make Room***, the song is a retelling of Jesus’ birth and holds a compelling hook that simply says: “Is there room in your heart/For God to write His story.” I was especially moved by the stunning three-part harmony, by Hall, Maher and Crowns pianist, Megan Garrett.

Christmas classic, ***What Child is This***, is done justice, on the EP, with hauntingly beautiful vocal and simple arrangement. Garrett takes the lead, singing the popular verses of the song, with a new chorus, that declares: “This is Christ the King/Shepherds fall and angels sing!”

Garrett’s voice powerfully, and effortlessly, delivers another festive anthem, ***O Holy Night***. Again, with uncomplicated musical arrangement, and really gorgeous vocal, she totally nails it.

My only problem with ***It’s Finally Christmas***, is that I wish it had more than just six tracks on it. A stunning collection of Christ-filled songs, produced and delivered with excellence – this was a great listen!

Jeremy Camp – Christmas: God with us – Review



Music review by Luchae

Williams

Christian music blue-eyed boy Jeremy Camp released his collection of Christmas songs, titled **Christmas: God With Us** in 2012. Well-known for his contemporary, pop-rock style, Camp has taken some of the more popular festive classics and given them new life.

Camp's rock influence can clearly be heard in the anthem, **Hark The Herald Angels Sing**. The track has been spruced up with electric guitar and mod production elements. Another favourite, **Joy To The World**, is also given a more urban flavour, with Camp adding his own bridge to the song, instantly creating a moment of worship.

I was also caught up in the singer's poignant rendition of **O Little Town of Bethlehem**. He once again adds his own bridge to the classic, taking the listener into a moment of free

worship.

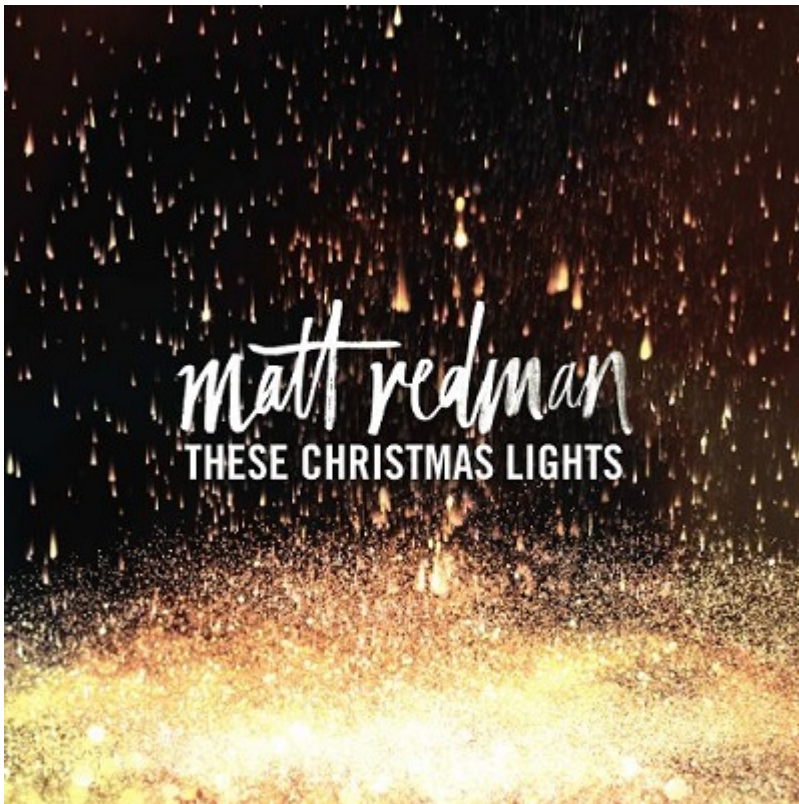
Other Christmas ballads found on the album are ***Away In a Manger***, ***Mary Did You Know*** and one of my favourite festive songs, ***O Come O Come Emmanuel***. The latter has a beautiful acoustic guitar and string accompaniment, eventually building up as Camp belts out “Rejoice!/Rejoice!/Emmanuel/Shall come to thee/O Israel!”

Besides the traditional hymns, Camp also does covers of three secular Christmas songs. ***Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas*** is kept mellow and melodic and ***Let It Snow*** has a fun jive to it. Album opener, ***Jingle Bell Rock***, comes complete with Christmas bells, a groovy guitar solo and the fun singalong element that the song is well known for.

I enjoyed Camp’s only original offering, on the album. The mid-tempo, guitar-driven title track, ***God With Us***, has a simple arrangement and easy-to-learn melody. Lyrically, it is uncomplicated and biblically it’s sound, with a chorus that says: “Emmanuel/Our humble King/We give you our hearts as an offering/You laid down your crown and became as dust/Emmanuel, God with us.”

With guitar solos, a solid rock influence and Camp’s amazing husky tone, this album has quickly grown on me. I enjoyed hearing all my favourite Christmas songs untampered with, and appreciated the newly-added hooks and bridges that move this festive album into a worship space. The songs are produced with excellence, and I love the clean, modern feel that it holds, while still proclaiming the message: Christ is born! I really enjoyed this one.

Matt Redman – These Christmas Lights: Review



Music Review by Luchae

Williams

With two Grammy nods and numerous Dove awards to his name, one can only expect brilliance when you pick up a Matt Redman album.

And with this, his very first festive-inspired album, you find just that. Released in 2016,

These Christmas Lights is jam-packed with Redman originals and a hodge-podge of traditional anthems cut and pasted to fit the songwriter's idea of what worship, during the Advent season, should sound like.

Album opener, and title track, *These Christmas Lights*, lets slip that you will not be finding your average, festive, sing along songs here! The track speaks about the opening of eyes and hearts, to the wondrous, miraculous birth of a Saviour. I

particularly loved the lyric that says: "Say a prayer that in this world/all these lights, these Christmas lights/Will shine for you/And you alone." This message, clearly, is Redman's heart song through out the entire album and is a fitting opener.

You'll find similar themes in anthemic songs such as *His Name Shall Be* and *Glory Hallelujah*. The latter has a driving drum beat, and an almost chant-like chorus that simply says "Glory Hallelujah/Sing the praises of our God!"

I enjoyed the three duet's featuring Chris Tomlin, Natasha Bedingfield and vocal powerhouse Tasha Cobbs, respectively.

Prolific singer and songwriter, Tomlin's offering, called *Angels (Singing Gloria)* is a more mod version of the age-old hymn, Gloria in Excelsis Deo.

Pop star Bedingfield brings her own vocal prowess and songwriting skill to the original track, *Help From Heaven*. The song is a contemporary, soul-filled ballad, speaking about Jesus, our "help from heaven".

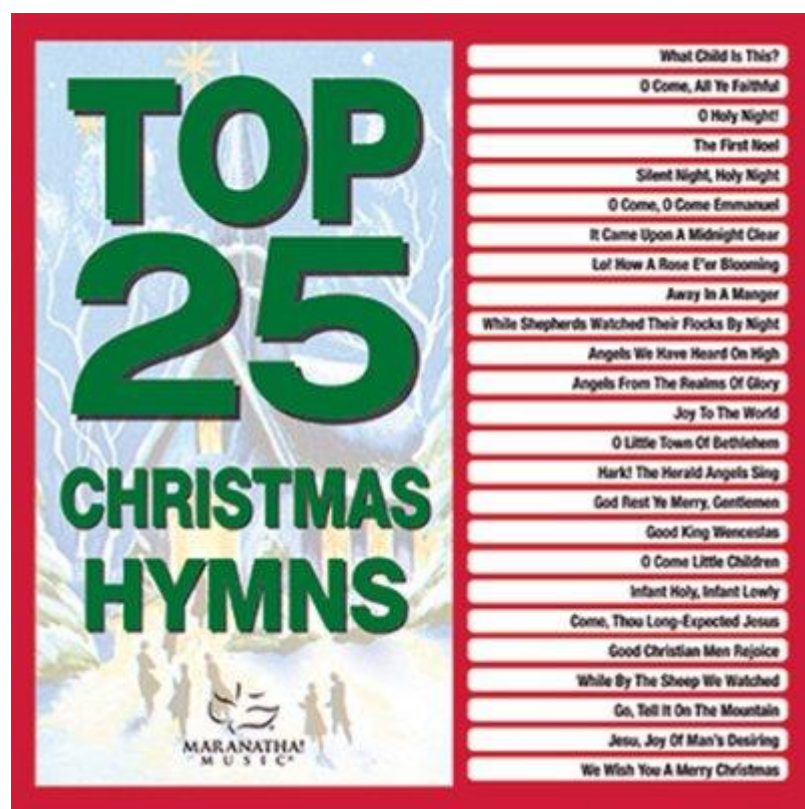
As always, Tasha Cobbs brings the thunder with her big voice in worship song, *Glory To You In The Highest*. The track speaks about Jesus bridging the great divide, and builds into a magnetic bridge that sees the duo belting out the age old chorus "O come let us adore him!"

If you're a fan of the popular Christmas classics, you'll be pleased to hear familiar melodies on tracks such as *O Little Town (The Glory of Christmas)* and everyone's favorite festive anthem, *Joy to the World*, featured on Redman's offering *Hearts Waiting (Joy to the World)*.

If you're looking for a Christmas album that is more worship and less "jingle bells", then this is for you. This album paints a picture of the sacrifice and miracle of Christ's birth and draws listeners into a moment of selfless worship.

As one can expect, the songwriting is on point, and Matt Redman's production team brings their A-game, as always. Definitely a must-have for the ardent Christmas music collector and worship lover.

Maranatha Music Top 25 Christmas Hymns: Review



A music review by Luchae

Williams

Maranatha Music released their Top 25 Christmas Hymns compilation album in October 2017. The 2-CD collection boasts a collection of 25 well-loved traditional festive season

inspired songs and hymns.

As is expected, your favorite Christmas anthems, such as *Joy To The World*, *Silent Night*, *Hark The Herald Angels Sing* and *We Wish You A Merry Christmas* can be found on the collection.

I particularly enjoyed the funky version of *Go, Tell It On The Mountain*. Complete with a powerhouse choir, impressive instrumentation and amazing vocal arrangements, this age old classic is given new life on the album and certainly got me jiving along.

For those looking for something a little more mellow, the addition of instrumental versions of much loved Christmas carols, such as *Away In A Manger*, *Oh Holy Night* and *The First Noel*, really set the atmosphere.

And for those not familiar with the more classic Yuletide anthems, expect to be introduced to an array of songs not often heard, such as *Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus*, *Good Christian Men Rejoice* and *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*.

Whether you're looking to set the atmosphere, or if it's easy listening you desire, Maranatha Music has put together an assortment of classic tunes that would do well on your Christmas morning playlist.

Crowder – Oh For Joy: Review

oh for joy



DAVID CROWDER*BAND

Music review by Luchae

Williams

American Christian folktronica musician, David Crowder, released his first holiday-themed album in 2011, under his stage name Crowder. The festive collection, titled ***Oh For Joy***, is a mixture of classic rock, pop and folk – a sound that the singer is well known for.

In fact, if you are familiar with Crowder and his funky fresh sound, it would come as no surprise that this eight-song collection is filled with musical experimentation at it's very best!

The album opener, *Joy To The World*, is a festive array of electronics, catchy guitar riffs and David Crowder's bellowing vocals, delivering the popular Christmas anthem to us with intention. There is a slight mix, in the song's bridge, where he's added new lyrics that say "Oh for joy/Lift up your voice/The Christ has come/The Christ has come!"

I love the almost pop-sounding rhythm of his version of *The First Noel*. The song, usually sung as a ballad, is given a

fresh take, while still maintaining the melody that we have come to love. The same can be said for classics such as *Go, Tell It On The Mountain* and *O Holy Night*.

I love the folk inspired sound of *Angels We Have Heard On High*, complete with fiddles and a catchy bass line! The popular Christmas anthem, *O Come O Come Emmanuel* is given a bluegrass feel, with crooning vocals and amazing guitar solos that create an atmosphere of reverence.

The intro of *Silent Night* is probably one of my favorite moments on the album. With melodic acoustic guitar drawing us in, the song was recorded with a crowd singing along, creating a moment of reflection and worship as we remember the birth and life of Jesus.

Album closer, *Carol Of The Bells/Christmas Eve*, does a spectacular job at pulling it all together, in an orchestral display of excellence! This live recording of the classic is done in true celebration style and ends the album off nicely.

If you're looking for a Christmas album, with a difference, this EP could be one to grab. David Crowder's heart for worship, and musical genius, is beautifully paired in this offering and I highly recommend it.