

Riley Clemmons – Riley Clemmons: Review



Music review by Luchae

Williams

American singing sensation, Riley Clemmons, released her self-titled debut album on August 4 2018. The 18-year old Christian-pop crooner was discovered at a school pageant in Nashville at the tender age of 13, but chose to continue with her schooling, while writing songs and honing her craft. And now, five years later, the songstress is newly signed to independent label, Maxx Recordings, with a debut video raking in more than 16 million views on Youtube earlier this year.

'Broken Prayers'

The album's debut single, ***Broken Prayers***, was released in December 2017 and peaked at No 17 on the Hot Christian Songs chart. In a behind-the-song story posted on Youtube, Riley explains that the song came from a space of deep brokenness. "The song came from a place of truly finding peace in the fact that God takes you at your most broken, at your lowest place and at your roughest. And not only does He take you there, but He delights in it. And He genuinely loves you in that place." The album features a piano version of the song as well, which nicely shows off Riley's impressive vocal range and rich tone.

Second single, **Better For It**, has become a firm favourite and is already in regular rotation on Radio Disney. The track is a catchy, pop-infused faith song that basically speaks about God turning your ashes into beauty for your good and His glory. This one really had me hooked from the get go! It has a jivey hook and a fun element to it, which really makes it memorable.

This fresh-faced singer has received quite a lot of attention on Youtube. Her third music video, for the song **Hold On**, accumulated more than half a million views in less than two weeks. The song is definitely more of a contemporary dance track, aimed at a younger audience.

I was instantly drawn to ballad, **Broke**. It best highlights the singer's smokey, textured vocal and I love the soulful, almost sultry sound of the song. The melody is really beautiful and the message behind the song is quite powerful. She sings: "With you/I don't need to hide/that I'm a little broke inside/you love me when I'm broke inside." This is a must listen!

Another ballad that really moved me was the piano driven **Drop Everything**. The song is both skilfully written and composed and Riley adds just the right amount of drama and depth, vocally. The song speaks about quietening external voices, to hear from God. Riley sings: "I've been talking too much/Now I'm listening."

Other songs worth noting include the EDM-infused **Running After You** that speaks about chasing after God. **You First** is a funky, soul-filled ode to God, that says: "I love how You love me/At my best and worst/...I've got scars/But you call them beautiful..."

With a strong start, Riley Clemmons' introduction to the Christian music arena is definitely one to take note of. Well-written songs that feature incredible vocal performances and really fun, catchy compositions are what you can expect from

this offering. If Christian-pop is your scene, you should definitely give this one a go. If not, her ballads are worth a listen! I am looking forward to hearing more music from this songstress.

Pat Barrett – Pat Barrett: Review



Music review by Luchae

Williams

Prolific singer and songwriter, Pat Barrett, of Housefires fame, released his self-titled debut album on July 20 2018.

You may remember the worship leader as a primary vocalist and songwriter for the Atlanta-based worship ensemble, Housefires. He also co-wrote award-winning worship song, *Good Good Father* and has penned a children's book, with the same name, with

Christian music super star, Chris Tomlin.

Barrett was signed as a flagship artist on Tomlin's new record label, Bowyer & Bow. He shared: "As a worship leader and songwriter, Chris has been such an influential person in my life and to have him be a guiding voice as I take these next steps is really meaningful. My heart in all of this is that these songs would help all of us lift our eyes and connect (or reconnect) with God in a way that impacts our real, everyday lives."

"I'm excited to have a song that's singing Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life and that also acknowledges doubt and fear, without giving it the platform."

Into Faith

Barrett's piercing vocal hit me square in the heart, with the opening lines of the first track, ***Into Faith I Go***, saying: "I've never been good at change/ If I'm honest, it's always scared me/But I can't deny the stirring deep inside me/And I know it's time to stop resisting." I was immediately so impressed by the quality of the singer's vocals... wow! The track is a reflective, profound ballad that speaks about holding on to your faith even when it's not easy.

I love Barrett's take on the traditional, classic refrain "God is so Good". Titled ***God Is So Good (You Are Worthy)***, the track starts off with a funky bass and percussion intro, followed by a sturdy first verse that leads us into the popular chorus: "God is so good/He's so good to me." My absolute favorite part of the track is when Barrett shoots off into free worship, the longing and passion in his voice so evident, as he sings about the goodness of God. Goosebumps!

First single, ***The Way (New Horizon)***, hit No. 12 on the Christian Airplay chart. This ballad is through and through a beautiful devotion and will have you singing the actual Word: He is the way, the truth and the life! Again, Barrett's vocal

totally brings this one home, with just the right amount of soul, grit and earnestness, adding a depth to the song.

Other interesting worship moments on the album include the melodic, guitar driven ***Everything Is Sacred*** and the emotive, ***Better***, that says: "Your love is better than life/You are the well that won't run dry/I have tasted and I have seen/Oh, You are better than all these things."

If you're looking for the more congregational track, you'll enjoy ***Build My Life*** and ***My Hallelujah***. Other notable tracks include contemporary Christian song, ***Sparrows and Lillies***, which features a memorable hook and a bluegrass sound.

I was also really impressed with duet, ***Sails***, featuring Bethel Music girls, Steffany Gretzinger and Amanda Cook. This quiet, spiritually deep ballad speaks about being vulnerable before the Lord. Gretzinger and Cook add another layer of excellence to Barrett's already impressive vocal game, and you can't help but be blown away by the sheer beauty of their voices. The song's melody is catchy, tender and easy to remember. The lyrics are profound and probably something you'll put on repeat when you're going through a particularly challenging season.

Pat Barrett's self-titled debut offering is definitely one to take note of! The big songs are impacting and commanding and the quiet ones are powerful and passionate. Pat Barrett's 15-year long journey of digging spiritual wells, in the music industry, has certainly paid off! His voice is impeccable and his writing style is impressive. I highly recommend this album!

Planetshakers – Legacy: Review



Music review by Luchae Williams

Australian worship collective, Planetshakers, released their **Legacy** CD and DVD project in September 2017.

The 12-track collection comprises live worship recorded at Planetshakers worship concerts in Manila, Melbourne and Kuala Lumpur. The project was first released in two parts on the *Legacy Part 1: Alive Again* and *Legacy Part 2: Passion* EPs. Four more songs were recorded live in Melbourne and added to the collection. This release also includes a digital deluxe version, a songbook and 10-track live DVD.

The ministry celebrated its 20th anniversary last year. Talking about legacy and what legacy means to Planetshakers, Senior Pastor Russell Evans shares: “If people get in the presence of God and they encounter Him, He can give them a dream for their life. Then, out of that, they go and change their world.”

Legacy

The band is well known for high energy praise and vibrant worship, and this album does not fail to deliver on real Planetshaker-style worship! It kicks off with a typical Planetshakers anthem, this one called ***Alive Again***, talking about the love and goodness of God. Praise tracks, ***Through it All*** and ***Drawing Closer*** have a similar vibe. Both seem to be aimed at a younger crowd of worshipers, but are fun and deep enough for all ages to get into.

I also found myself bopping along to the honky-tonk contemporary dance track, ***Passion***. This is a song of surrender and I'm sure it will find itself on many youth set lists.

I enjoyed the powerful theme in the track, ***Prophesy***. The song speaks about stepping up to act as God's mouthpiece and has a more modern/contemporary feel than the first two tracks. The lyrics say: "The word of the Lord in my mouth/To bring about the change/Full of Your power/I step out/Declare aloud Your praise!"

Another song that tackles the often overlooked topic of the prophetic is worship ballad, ***We Speak Life***. This track speaks about the faithfulness of God and has some really powerful moments with a memorable chorus that says: "Our God is more than able/Our God will never fail/He is always with us/He is faithful till the end."

Other favorites include ***Be My Vision*** and ***Here's My Life***. Both the penmanship and composition of the songs are really impressive, clearly written by a team who are firmly rooted in Christ. The melodies are likeable and easy to learn and most of the tracks on the album would do well in a corporate worship setting.

Power ballad, ***You Call Me Beautiful***, is such a stunning reminder of our true identity in Christ. I love that it shares the revelation that God sees a masterpiece when He sees us.

Another notable worship moment is provided by *All On The Altar*. This track speaks about surrendering, laying it all on the altar and allowing God's all consuming fire to refine us.

With a ministry span of more than 20 years, and 34 albums under their belt, this team has done the hard work – laying a solid foundation in the Spirit that now blankets everything they put their hands to. Planetshakers fans will be pleased to add this album to their collection. If you're new to Planetshakers, I would highly recommend that you have a listen to some of their earlier releases too. Younger worshipers and those who enjoy EDM worship will enjoy this one.

Kelontae Gavin – The Higher Experience: Review



Music review by Luchae

Williams

Gospel music newcomer Kelontae Gavin released his debut album on April 27 2018. Titled ***The Higher Experience***, the album made its debut at No 2 on the Top Gospel Albums chart, with its first radio single, *No Ordinary Worship*, reaching No 14 on the Billboard Gospel Airplay chart in May 2018.

The 19-year-old worship leader shot to YouTube stardom when a 2014 YouTube video of him singing the hymn, *I Won't Complain*, to a cafeteria worker at his high school, went viral. The video reached over one million YouTube views and catapulted the young singer's Gospel music career.

Recorded live at Fresh Start Church in Atlanta, *The Higher Experience*, is through and through a full gospel album, complete with powerhouse vocals from Gavin, guest artists and a notable Gospel choir. The album was produced by TedyP and star maker, Marquis Boone, who is well known in Gospel music circles for his ability to track down and groom promising young artists.

'The Higher Experience'

The album opens with a stunning acapella intro – a rendition of Donnie McClurkin's ***Holy, Holy, Holy***, as the choir delivers an impressive, complex vocal arrangement that honestly requires no instrument accompaniment. But, if it's magnificent musical arrangements that you're looking for, you'll be impressed with the quality of production and musicianship found throughout the album. I especially enjoyed the praise trio ***It's Working, He Worked It*** and ***Praise Break***.

I was also immediately drawn in by congregational praise track, ***We Lift You***. The song introduces you to the album's sound and the worship leader's stunning vocal range which is undoubtedly reminiscent of the type of Gospel music made popular by McClurkin and the likes. Electrifying and raw, Gavin's vocal certainly is impressive for someone his age. In

fact, you would expect this level of grit and depth to come from a minister twice his age!

The track, ***In This Room***, is a call and response worship song, featuring Gospel crooner, Geoffrey Golden. The song points the listener to the King of Kings and flows into a time of ministry, as Gavin preaches powerfully for a few minutes.

Other notable worship tracks on the album include ***There's No One Like You*** and my favorite song on the album, title track ***No Ordinary Worship***. Gavin delivers a solid vocal performance on the latter, commanding your attention. The song itself is a gorgeous, robust ballad, that says: "This ain't no ordinary worship/This ain't no ordinary song/The God I serve is greater than the ordinary/So I'm going to give it all I have in this moment."

I was pleased to find a new studio version of his single, ***Higher***, on the album. The track is a congregational mid-tempo song that speaks about abandoning your ways for the things of God. For those who are curious, a version of his YouTube cover of hymn ***I Won't Complain*** is also featured on the album.

RnB and Gospel music fundis will appreciate Kelontae Gavin's sheer grit, vocal technique and the masterful way in which he delivers each song. Gavin's sound and gifting is definitely beyond his years and it has been such a pleasure to have him minister to me through this album. If you're looking for a soulful worship experience, this one is for you.

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!”

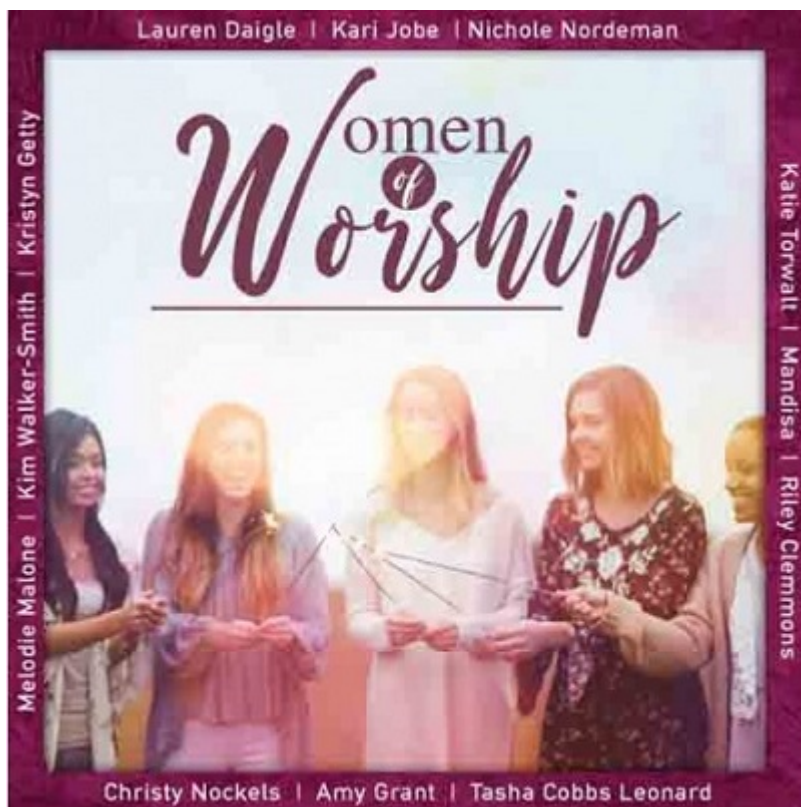
The more upbeat songs on the album include the acoustic driven ***Garments*** and the catchy ***Only Takes a Moment*** – a mid tempo praise song with a soulful edge.

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!

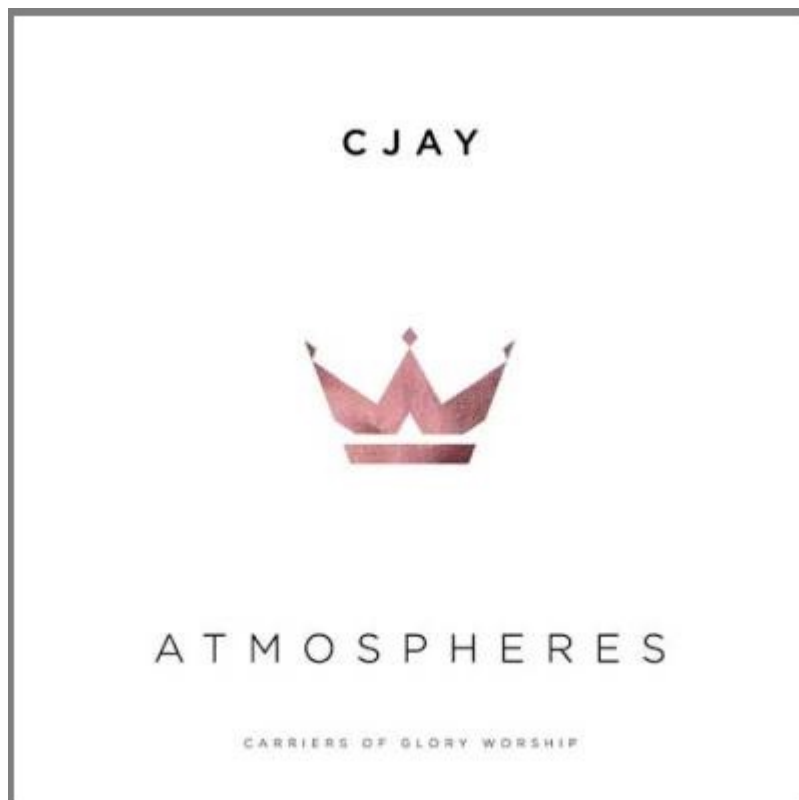
Christian music legend, Morris Chapman is also featured a few times on the collection with tracks ***The Family Prayer Song (As For Me And My House)***, ***The Reconciliation Song*** and ***Jesus Your Name***.

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!