

# Sound alternatives

By [Louis R. Carlozo](#) in the [June 14, 2005](#) issue

## In Review



## Universal United House of Prayer

Buddy Miller  
New West



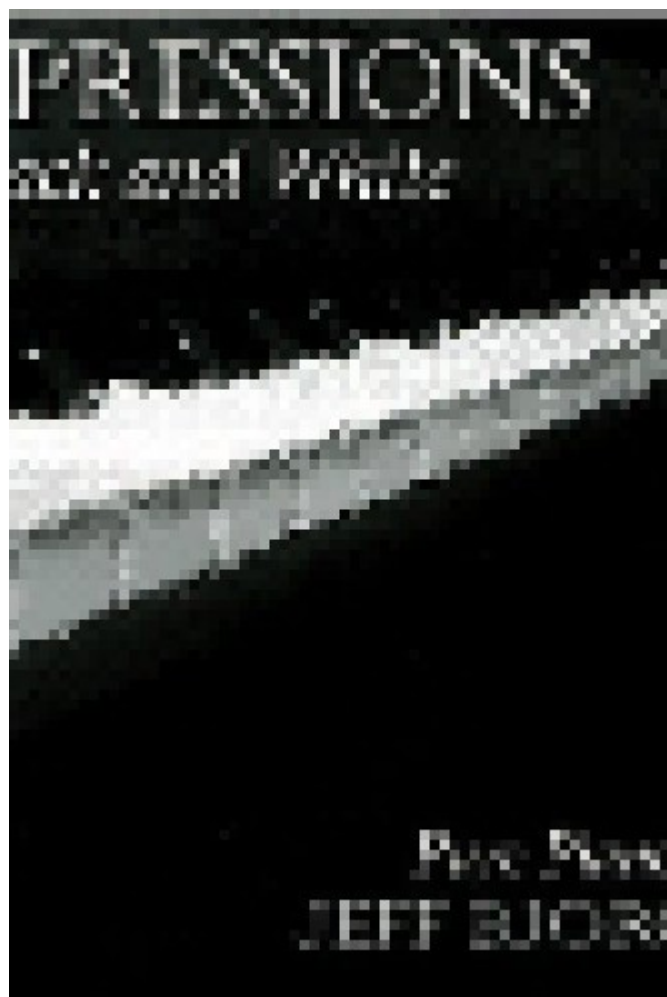
## **The Gospel Truth: The Complete Gospel Sessions**

Johnny Paycheck  
Little Darlin'/KOCH



## **Day of Colours**

Rizwan-Muazzam Qawwali  
Real World



## **Impressions in Black and White**

Jeff Bjorck  
Pure Piano



## **Public Library**

Jonathan Rundman  
Salt Lady



## Altitude

Yellowsecond

Floodgate



## **Silk Road Journeys: Beyond the Horizon**

Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble

Sony Classical



## John Davis

John Davis  
Rambler





## **Play On**

Celtic Fiddle Festival  
Green Linnet



## **Synchro Series**

King Sunny Ade, by King Sunny Ade  
IndigeDisc



## **Never Take Friendship Personal**

Amberlin

Tooth & Nail



## **Beauty Has Grace**

Jaci Velasquez  
Word/Curb

Miller's spiritually charged music isn't afraid to wrestle with contradictions and paradox. A cover of Mark Heard's "Worry Too Much" may sound muscular and tight, but the lyrics reflect anxiety. It is quickly countered by "There's a Higher Power," delivered with the rousing spirit of old-time southern gospel. No less compelling and inspiring are originals such as "Shelter Me," "Don't Wait" and the hoedown ditty "This Old Word."

It's hard to believe that the man best known for "Take This Job and Shove It" had a gospel past. That's reflected in these cuts recorded at RCA's legendary Studio B in 1966. Of the 23 tracks, eight are duplicates—reissued in 1978 with strings and backing vocals by the Jordanaires (best known for working with Elvis Presley).

Though the string arrangements add syrup, Paycheck's fine singing is a constant: stentorian yet frayed.

The brothers Rizwan and Muazzam, nephews of the late Sufi singing great Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, deliver a majestic album. Imagine the droning power of Gregorian chant melded with the expressiveness of blues shouters. With the simple instrumentation of harmonium and tablas, *Colours* addresses spiritual themes central to the Qawwali tradition. "Light of My Life," a Persian song in praise of Allah, is particularly arresting: "You are generous where I am mean/ You have shown me forgiveness despite my repeated sins."

Fans of pianists such as George Winston and Liz Story will find plenty to like here, though Bjorck's instrumental compositions and playing reflect a vibrancy and radiance that set him apart. The album is marked by a meditative quality, as on "Feather's Flight," a composition weaved around a hypnotic eight-note bass pattern. On "Campfire Remembrance," major- and minor-key turns create a compelling tension, until the final notes dissipate like dying embers.

In 2000 this offbeat Lutheran rocker released the concept album to end them all—a lo-fi, 52-song double disc with each track tied to a week on the liturgical calendar. This follow-up disc features smart production and keen songwriting. On "Smart Girls" Rundman pays tribute to intellectual women ("Cause love is science, love is art"), while "Almost Never See" is a midnight-blue number wrapped in a haze of mandolin, fiddle and heavy percussion.

Yellowsecond knows how to let the distorted guitars dominate, but can also combine grime-and-chime textures in a way that yields goose bumps, as on the acoustic guitar-tinged "Silhouette." "Some Other Way" cross-pollinates brushed snare, spacey slide guitar and jazzy acoustic chords into a song of dreamy longing, while "Plume" bounces along with its sweet pop melody, synthesizer line and pounding drums: "I think it's time to show / I've moved on / I've let go."

The links between East and West are explored on the latest from Yo-Yo Ma, now in his fifth year collaborating with the Silk Road Ensemble. Unfurled in three movements ("Enchantments," "Origins," "New Beginnings"), this album plays like the soundtrack to a film that mixes *Lord of the Rings* with *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. From a plaintive cello track to the yelping scales and finger cymbals, this disc is exotic and sublime.

You'd think the former Superdrag front man is the long-lost son of Brian Wilson, as evidenced on tracks such as the soaring "I Hear Your Voice": "I want to know what it's like to be free / To be the way that You want me to be." Elsewhere Davis recalls the Raspberries with the rousing "Me & My Girl" (a tune driven by 12-string electric guitar), and embraces blues rock on "Have Mercy." Tying the package together are themes of faith and redemption, a result of Davis's recent conversion to Christianity.

This album takes its title from a tragedy that almost tore the group apart; fiddler Johnny Cunningham died unexpectedly, leaving a void in the quartet's lineup. Enter Quebec musician Andre Brunet and an inspired shift in the group's live sound. The result is this rich collection that leads off with a trio of foot-stomping Quebecois tunes. On another musical continent, the Yiddish cut "Itzikel" drips with delightful, D-minor mournfulness.

King Sunny Ade is to Nigerian juju music what the Grateful Dead is to American rock—and the similarities between the two show on this disc, a retrospective of Ade's work from the early 1980s. Favoring a free-form approach, Ade relies on pulsating rhythm and sunshine bursts of lead guitar.

While its songs and sing-along hooks often satisfy, *Personal* meanders on a formulaic plateau. Moments here show musical and spiritual passion: "(the symphony of the) blasé" is a steely, key-of-C ballad that suggests some exotic hybrid of The Cure and Toad the Wet Sprocket. Yet too much of the disc opts for a loud, driving approach. This is most evident on "dance, dance Christina Paffgen," a song that clocks in at an epic 7:09, but lacks the drama or dynamics to justify its length.

Bucking the trend of her career and Christian music in general, Velasquez teams with a British producer, Martin Terefe (Coldplay, Ron Sexsmith). Sometimes the results are awkward, as when Velasquez delves into overshouted rock or chest-thumping balladry ("Lay It Down"). But when she sticks to upbeat pop, Velasquez charms the listener with breathiness reminiscent of The Bangles' Susanna Hoffs.