

Sound alternatives

By [Louis R. Carlozo](#) in the [September 20, 2005](#) issue

In Review



Thunder, Lightning, Strike

The Go! Team
Memphis Industries



Amassakoul

Tinariwen
World Village



Imagination

Bethany Dillon

EMI/Sparrow



Foggy Mountain Gospel

Flatt and Scruggs
Columbia/Legacy



The Forgotten Arm

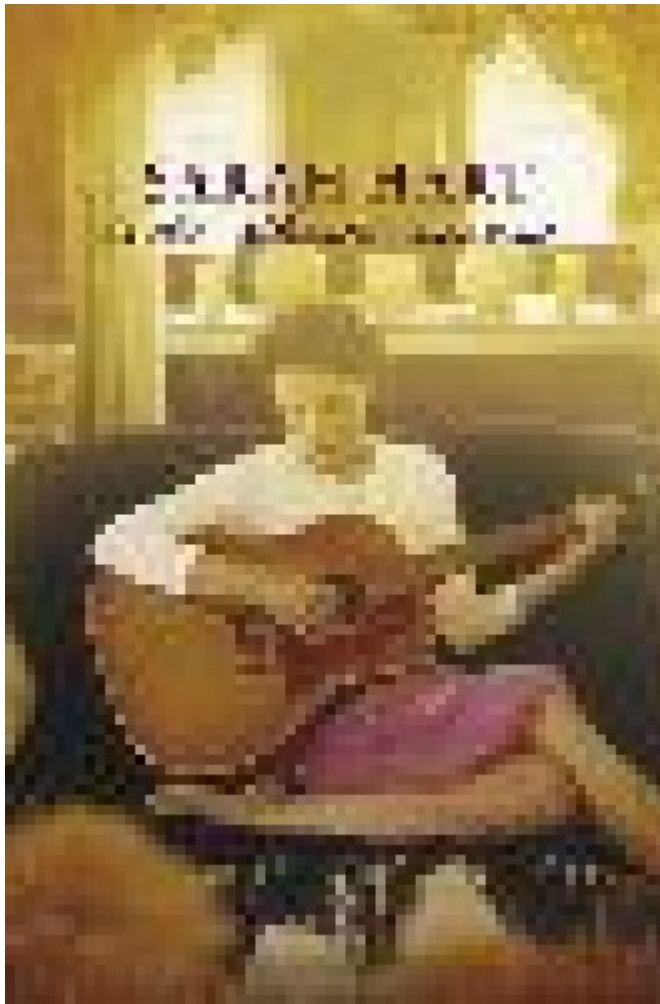
Aimee Mann

SuperEgo



Soft Dangerous Shores

Chris Whitley
Messenger



Into These Rooms

Sarah Hart
spiritandsong.com



Amongst the People: Live at the House of Tribes

Wynton Marsalis

Blue Note



Amongst the People: Live at the House of Tribes

Wynton Marsalis

Blue Note



Diam

DaToure

Real World



Souls' Chapel

Marty Stuart and His Fabulous Superlatives
Superlatone



Everything In Between

Danny Oertli
self-released



O How the Mighty Have Fallen

The Choir
Galaxy

The first new Choir disc in five years recalls U2, Coldplay and the Wallflowers. From the nitro-burning “Nobody Gets a Smooth Ride” to the lovely, melodic chorus that anchors “She’s Alright,” this is a sparkling record built on simple but effective pop strengths, including Singer Derry Daugherty’s whispery-yet-focused tenor. “Mercy Will Prevail,” with Steve Hindalong’s pulsating toms, delivers this cold-sweat meditation: “Love never fails/ Mercy will prevail / I wanna swear it’s true, but it’s hard to defend it.”

This multiracial, co-ed English collective has fashioned one of 2005’s stunners, a largely instrumental record that unleashes cheesy synth strings, wobbly guitars, harmonicas, cheerleader vocals, horn sections, trashy beat-box loops and banjo

samples over the course of 38 gratifying minutes. From “Lady Flash” (which recalls Archie Bell & the Drells’ soul hit “Tighten Up”) to “Feelgood by Numbers” (which could pass for a Vince Guaraldi score to a lost Peanuts special), this is pop music twisted in the funhouse mirror, reflecting a celebratory groove.

The members of Tinariwen met in Lybian refugee camps two decades ago after fleeing unrest in their native Mali. Adapting traditional tribal melodies for electric guitar (accompanied by simple hand percussion), the group achieves a mesmerizing result, whether singing about a thankless trek across the Sahara or familial suffering.

Bethany Dillon has a silky, dusky voice (think Paula Cole) that many a singer-songwriter would die for, but this album hardly lives up to its promising moniker. On the first single, “All That I Can Do,” the separate elements prove appealing: Dillon’s voice nails the sky-high chorus with zest, buffeted by responding backup vocals and a steady beat. But the tambourine driving the chorus is a sonic brushstroke over-repeated throughout this disc—and the song itself resembles something heard countless times on Christian hit radio.

Forever identified with the rip-roaring “Foggy Mountain Breakdown” and the theme from *The Beverly Hillbillies*, guitarist-vocalist Lester Flatt and five-string banjo wizard Earl Scruggs also had a serious spiritual side. This two-disc, 52-song set, which spans their entire gospel output from 1951 to 1966, proves that great things come in small packages: no song runs past three minutes. The numbers range from the high-and-lonesome “I’m Working on a Road” to the steady-rolling “You Can Feel It in Your Soul,” accompanied by water-smooth resonator guitar.

In 1985, Aimee Mann and ‘Til Tuesday broke out with the stealth pop hit “Voices Carry.” Mann has since matured into a singer-songwriter of intelligence and confidence, and here enlists guitarist Jeff Trott (Sheryl Crow) and producer Joe Henry to craft an assured, soundtrack-like album about a struggling, addicted boxer who meets his love at a state fair. Inspired by her work on the film *Magnolia*, Mann is in blade-sharp form.

Like Neil Young, Chris Whitley delights in continually challenging his audience. Yet his efforts are hardly self-indulgent. They are always anchored by his masterful Dobro guitar playing, cinematic songwriting and ash-smeared voice. Here Whitley gives us the sound of blues as if spun in the centrifuge of a computer hard drive, emerging full of blips, bends and groaning synthetic textures.

It's a testament to Sarah Hart's talent and spiritual poise that she can distill an influence as barbed as Sylvia Plath (her favorite poet) into acoustic music that's delicate and inspiring—without turning soft and sentimental. Highlighted by piano and cirrus-cloud electric guitar, "His Name Is Joseph" imagines Mary's nervous thoughts as she contemplates pregnancy. ("So You have chosen this for me / I accept it willingly / But as for him, I cannot tell.") Her voice is shining and sublime on tunes such as the lullaby-like "Go in Peace."

Fronting an eight-man band on this live-from-New York album, trumpeter Wynton Marsalis demonstrates the tasteful, bracing sound he is noted for, alternating between tempered, rounded melodies and escalating, rapid-fire riffs that peak with a squeal on Thelonious Monk's "Green Chimneys." Elsewhere, Cole Porter's "What Is This Thing Called Love?" dances to a brushed snare beat, bongos, and ensemble playing that boasts masterful dynamics and lively interplay. (At one point the musicians quote the Christmas classic "Sleigh Ride.") It's jazz worthy of the recording's intimate setting—only 29 seats.

Balancing all-American rock with ballads, Danny Oertli is a Christian musician with a difference. When he sings "Thank You, Jesus, for keeping hope alive" on "Mommy Paints the Sky," he knows from where he speaks—the song is inspired by the passing of his high-school sweetheart and wife, whom he lost after her harrowing battle with cancer. While the tender ballad may be a bit heavy on the strings, Oertli proves he can rock on "Fight for Me" (with its dirty Wurlitzer electric piano) and the breathless, pulsing "Nothing."

The title, which translates as "peace," reflects the spirit that infuses this record and which pours out of Toure's voice like a fountain of cool water. Imagine a tenor situated somewhere between Bob Marley and Paul McCartney. "Dendecuba" has the delicate acoustic sound of a lost track from the Beatles' *White Album*; "Kelimanta" begins with a playful volley of vocal gymnastics reminiscent of Bobby McFerrin; and "Mansa" channels the sultry sway of Brazilian pop by way of Africa.

Not many artists have the courage to admit they served jail time for driving drunk while recording a gospel record. The honesty of Marty Stuart (who has six top-ten hits and four Grammys to his credit) is as refreshing as the unfettered country grooves on this disc. "Way Down" sounds like a cross splice of "Green Onions" (the Booker T. and the MG's hit) and a southern gospel quartet, while "It's Time to Go Home" sets sermonlike lyrics (from 1 Thessalonians) to a sprightly minor-key groove.