

On Music

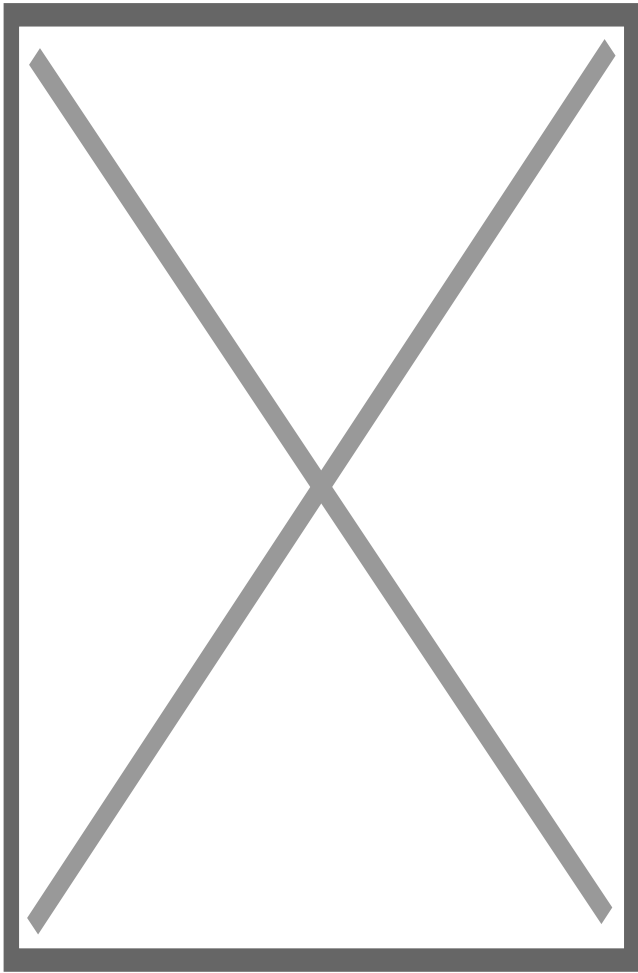
By [Louis R. Carlozo](#) in the [August 26, 2008](#) issue

In Review



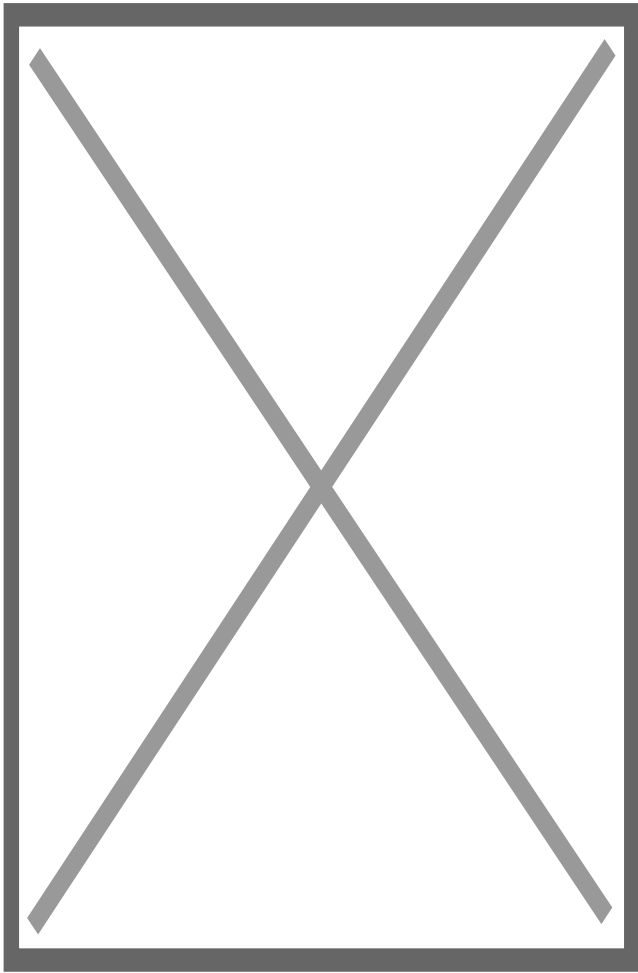
Dig!!! Lazarus, Dig!!!

Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds
Anti



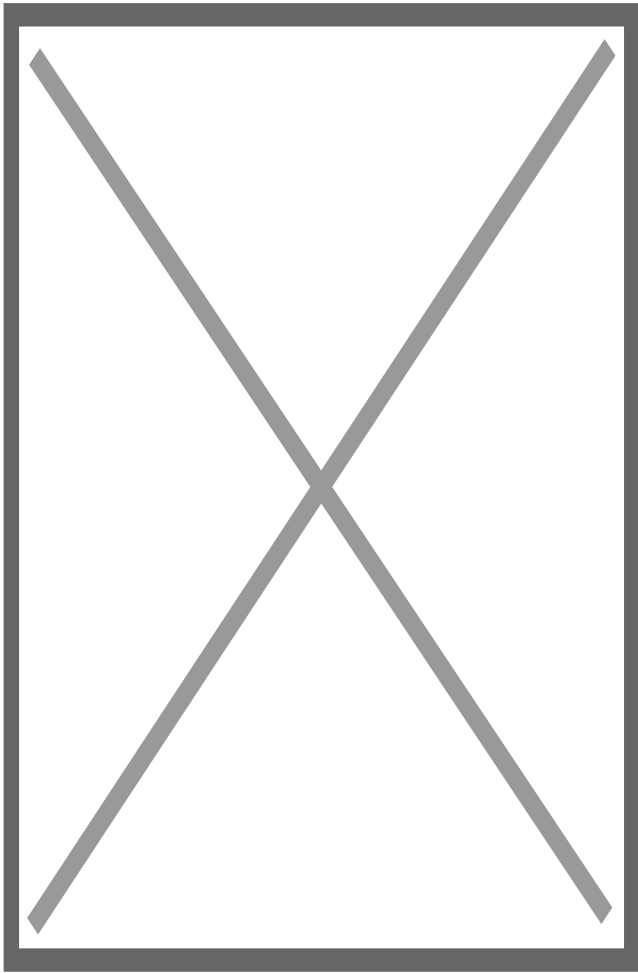
Stomp Glide Wobble

Northside Southpaws
Ruthless Rabbit



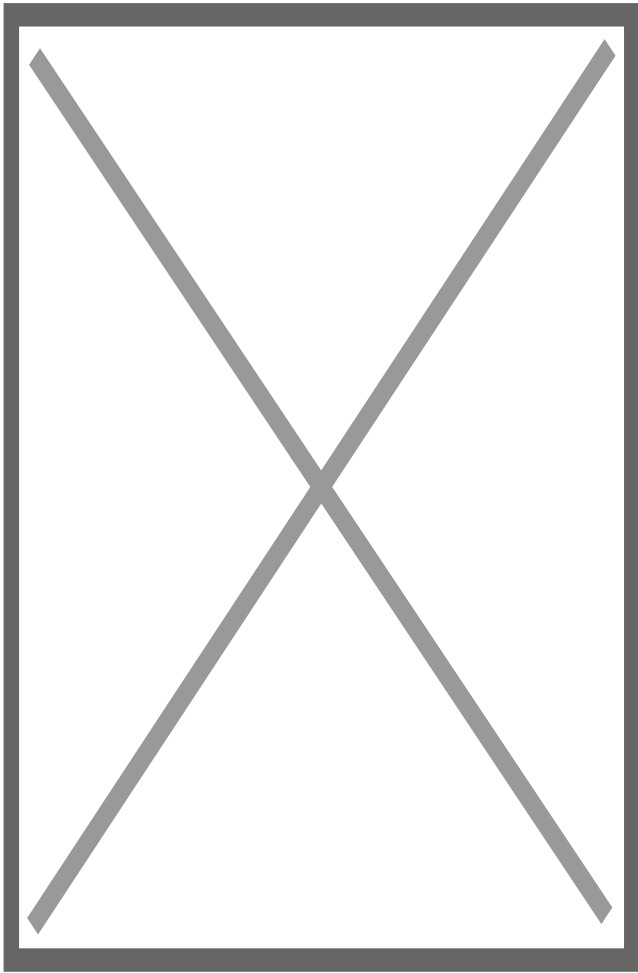
Last Night

Moby
Mute



Sharing the Road: Songs for Lent

Richard Buxvoort-Colligan
Augsburg Fortress



Still Commissioned: The Songs of Mitchell Jones

Mitchell Jones
Compendia

Nick Cave might not be well known, but time spent with this complex Australian rocker is well spent. He doesn't shy away from dense theological issues, which he explores in a rambling, lyrical style that recalls Jim Morrison at his poetic peak. Having survived addiction, broken relationships and enough stylistic shifts to inform five careers, Cave is an unlikely hero, somewhat resembling Johnny Cash (whose life had its own train-wreck qualities). In fact, Cash did his own version of Cave's "The Mercy Seat," the ultimate validation for a songwriter who called the Man in Black his hero.

Now comes Cave's *Dig!!! Lazarus, Dig!!!*—an album that welds together grinding punk, twisted pop, loop-based music and shuffling, blues-informed grooves, yet never loses its center. While some might lament that Cave and his backup band, the Bad Seeds, have mellowed, rest assured that a mellower Nick Cave is still bracing. Ruminating as usual on mortality, violence, love and the possibility of redemption, he affirms his core belief that "any true love song is a song to God."

The centerpiece of *Lazarus* is "We Call Upon the Author," a thundering drone of organ, drums and bass that takes on the age-old question of how a benevolent God allows so much suffering, sin and deception. At times alarmingly profane, "Author" recalls XTC's "Dear God," except that the indignation here is righteous rather than atheistic: "O rampant discrimination / mass poverty / third world debt / infectious disease / global inequality and

deepening socioeconomic divisions . . . We call upon the author to explain!” Cave’s rant might seem unintentionally comic, but it succeeds as the voice of a weary believer a step from losing faith.

In “Midnight Man,” set among feedback guitars and a swelling mod-style organ, the singer beholds a chrysalis splitting and declares: “It was born to live a day / Now it flies up from your hand and / It’s beautiful / It’s the one they call your ever-loving man.” That song sets up the album closer, “More News from Nowhere.” Meditative in the manner of Lou Reed’s “Walk on the Wild Side,” “Nowhere” catalogs a group of men and women chasing after wind. Yet Cave does not point fingers so much as paint himself as a wanderer in the gale, trying to keep on amid life’s nonsense.

Other CDs of note:

John Hasbrouck ranks as one of the Midwest’s most gifted guitarists, but here he picks up a resonator mandolin to team with another leftie, Matt Gandurski (resonator guitar). The southpaws throw strikes as they stay true to acoustic genres from bluegrass (the hopping “Jackson Stomp”) to Mediterranean-flavored balladry. (The D-minor “El Choclo” sounds ideal for a stroll in Venice.) Rags and stomps make up roughly half this sublime disc—but departures such as the pleasantly lulling “Rainbow Waltz” conjure dance floors of a different era, redolent with sawdust and salt spray, illumined by stars and gas lanterns.

The world’s only bald-vegan-Christian dance superstar returns with a 14-song disc that salutes New York’s club scene and its sophisticated electronic rhythms. Classically trained and sporting a punk-rock pedigree, Moby displays a continued knack for novelty; the sly funk guitar and slippery beats of “Ooh Yeah” embrace sweet female backups to suggest striding down a busy Big Apple thoroughfare. “Sweet Apocalypse” recalls the spacey Moog synthesizer soundscapes of a generation ago, and “I’m in Love” percolates with bouncy beats and a grainy female vocal that pierces the ear.

An influential Lutheran figure, Bruxvoort-Colligan makes music that tends toward the gentle side, so it’s refreshing to hear him rock on “God’s Love Endures Forever,” a ready-made youth-group anthem. This album’s 15 songs draw on psalms; aided by Minneapolis luminary John Hermanson, even acoustic-rooted numbers such as the soaring “Unfailing Love” get a welcome lift. “My God, O My God” suffers from clunky narrative and clichéd chimes. Still, there’s much to like, including the sublime “We Wait in Hope for Your Word” and “Now to God I Make My Vows.” The best comes last: “My Love Is My Shepherd” reinterprets Bach—and the 23rd Psalm—in tender lullaby fashion.

As an original member of Commissioned, Jones teamed with the legendary Fred Hammond to shape the modern gospel sound (and pave the way for the likes of Kirk Franklin). “Still Commissioned” collects 14 songs—most written or co-written by Jones, and four previously recorded by Commissioned. Among the group recordings, “Don’t Worry” dances with arpeggiated, chiming keyboards and snappy five-string bass to create a rubbery, joyful groove, backed by sunshine-bright backup vocals. A decidedly mellow disc, *Still Commissioned* is nonetheless uplifting—evidence of Jones’s talent for weaving soul textures and simple, heartfelt encouragement.