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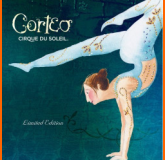
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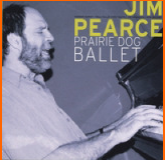
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Spotlights [Issue # 22]

Sarah Kelly: Looking Toward The Future

By Dean Truitt



When Sarah Kelly began the process of writing her latest album, *Where the Past Meets Today*, anyone would have believed she lived a charmed life. Her debut, *Take Me Away*, had received a Grammy nomination for Best Rock Gospel Performance and she was traveling the world singing to adoring fans whom she gave hope, support, and unwavering love.

However, Kelly had been clinging to a life that was smothering her glowing spirit. She reflects, "When I look back at this album, I wasn't even able to admit to myself at the time that I was in an abusive relationship. A lot of these songs, I thought I was writing to other people, but my own feelings were coming through. When I listen back to them, I now realize they were about my experience and I didn't even know it at the time."

Fortunately, a glimmer of hope came in an unlikely source. One of her new fans was important within the music industry and made a professional connection that would ultimately help release her from an abusive relationship. Dave Weideman, Guitar Center's Director of Artist Relations, thought Kelly's emotional voice had the same incendiary passion as Janis Joplin's. Weideman introduced her to producer Mike Clink, who is known for working with bands such as: Guns N' Roses, Motley Crue, and Megadeth.

On the unlikely pairing of a Christian singer with a hard rock producer, Kelly beams, "When I met him, I could tell he was going to see the project through and wasn't going to let it be half of what it could be. My intuition was right because we spent a year and a half on this project and to have a man of his caliber who's been involved in so many revolutionary albums working on your album is very humbling. Mike made me write nearly 60 songs. I was at a plateau and he gave me a lot of guidance, which I needed. I have grown as a songwriter, I have grown as an artist, and I have grown as a person under the direction of Mike Clink. It's been an honor to work with him."

Unlike many amazing vocalists who are unable to write their own ideas, Kelly has an amazing sense of self-expression that penetrates and connects immediately. It is no surprise people often break down in tears at her shows or speak about the overpowering experience of her performances. She reveals, "A lot of this record was me closing the door on that past and getting to a place where I wasn't OK with that anymore. I've made the changes I needed to make to have a healthy tomorrow. That experience comes through in the music and Mike walked me through a lot of these issues as a friend and as a producer. My music seeps with heart. You can definitely trace what's going on in my life with each song."

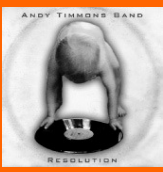
Each of the 11 tracks is a testimonial to a person's strength and courage. An impressive cast of musical giants lends a hand in the recording: Slash plays a few guitar solos and Jane's Addiction's Chris Chaney plays bass throughout the album. From the opening moments of "The Beauty of It All," Kelly's first words are questions, "Do I disappoint you? / Was I not enough to please you after all?" As the story unfolds, she



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gradually finds answers to some of the difficult questions within her challenging life. The music captures the vicissitudes of her life. "Still Breathing" is a raucous rocker while "About Midnight" is a serene piano ballad that gradually rises and soars to ecstatic joy. When Kelly sings, "Here in this valley / Where the shadows, they lead my way / Yes, I know that you're with me now / Where the past meets today," one cannot help but feel the overwhelming rapture of the expression.

By the album's close, her final statement is "Remember Me Well," an attempt to say goodbye with a forgiving smile. She has no intention of glossing over any painful details. Reflecting about the themes of *Where the Past Meets Today*, Sarah Kelly muses, "It's an album about freedom and honesty. I think those words are really synonyms. When you're able to be honest, that's half the battle to becoming free."



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