

MUSIC

Spirited music

Gay men wear their souls on their sleeves in two new CDs

BY LYNN THOMAS

Well, it's another Christmas past, and that can mean any number of things. It's either time to return that sweater, haul out the holly or increase the charge card limit for those after Christmas sales.

Now if you're a music lover, you might want to exchange that sweater for a couple of new CDs. And if you're a fan of contemporary Christian music, it's easy enough to go down to your favorite music store or online retailer and shop by category, but that's only going to bring you more of the usual suspects—and my guess is they're not necessarily gay artists.

Here's a chance for you to support local gay contemporary Christian artists in what I find to be a rather entertaining CD. It's barbershop meets Broadway with a distinctively Christian message. This is not a Christmas album per se but a sort of all-around celebration of faith.

The group, called We 3, features those other three tenors—OK, two tenors and a baritone—Mark Brown, Maury Evans and Rick Edmundson. They are ably accompanied by pianist Darcy White, who I found to be one of the surprise delights on this CD, *I Believe in Miracles*. Her strong, jazzy accompaniments are the glue that holds much of this music together.

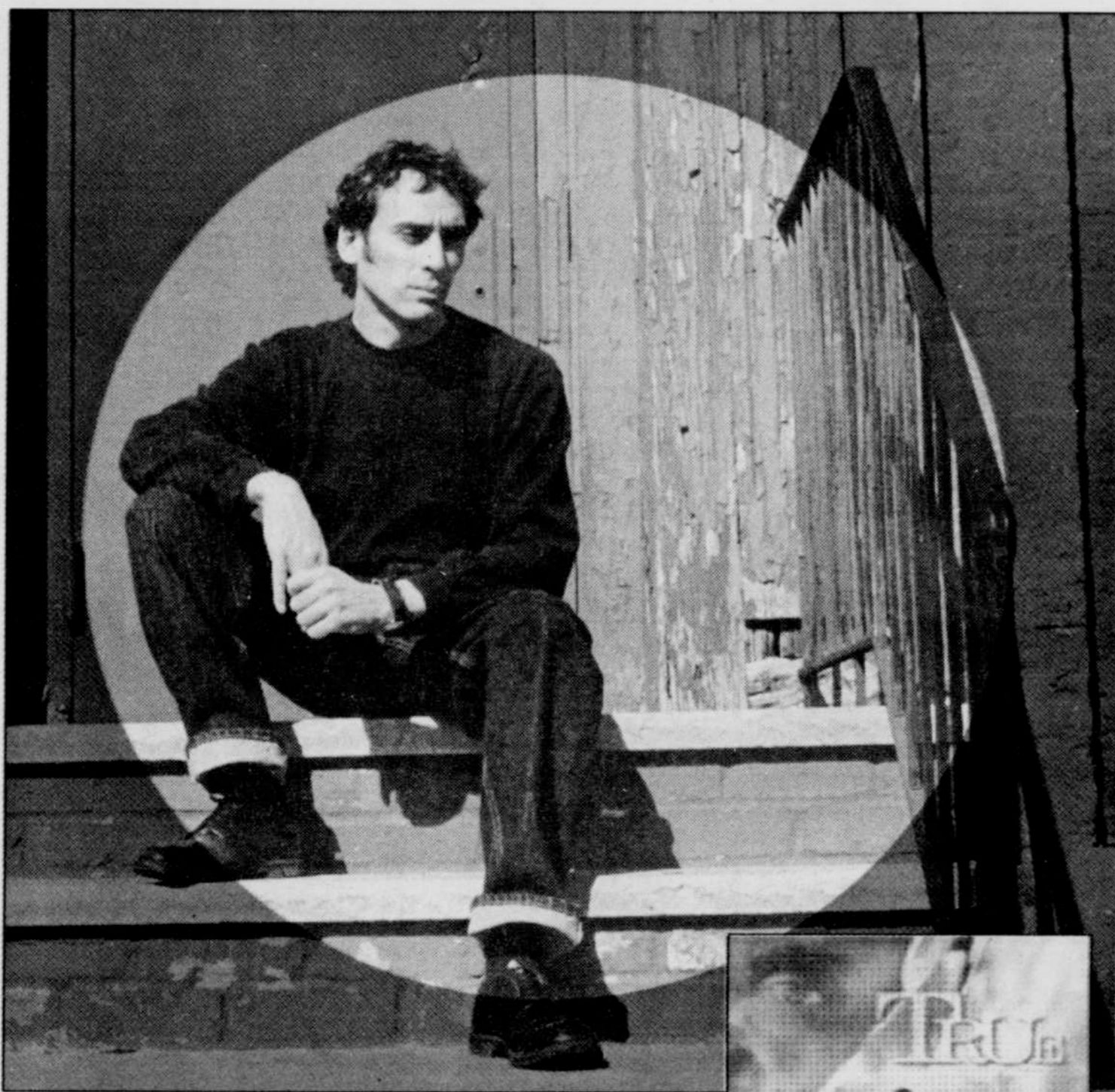
I Believe in Miracles features primarily original music written by baritone Brown. The harmonies are tight, and when they are the predominant focus, the music is at its best.

The opening song, "Glory to God," is a fine example of this and is reminiscent of *Godspell*. However, the solo singing is weaker and lacks the punch and joy of the trio.

"Let Us Rejoice" feels a bit like a sea chantey, while "No One," written by Brown and Evans, is distinctively discoesque. This eclectic mix of styles actually works pretty well within the contemporary Christian context.

The contemporary blends well with the traditional in a unique arrangement of two all-time favorites, "Crown Him with Many Crowns" and "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name." This piece starts out with a lovely a cappella boy band sound and moves on to add just enough piano and keyboard with just the right amount of syncopation in the mix to get your attention but not lose the power of the original work.

The title track, "I Believe in Miracles," is not my favorite; I find the lyrics to be not quite up to the standard set by the rest of the album. And although in a live setting the recurring upward key modulations throughout many of these songs are probably inspiring and uplifting, they get a little clichéd by the end of a whole CD.



Dave Hall sings his truth

According to We 3's Web site: "The impetus for forming the group was a benefit concert for a young Native American boy who was in need of heart surgery. Brown and Evans gave the initial concert as a duo. Offers to sing other concerts in the Portland area soon followed. To enhance the group's musical sound, Brown suggested that they make an addition of either a tenor or an alto, so Evans then asked Edmundson to join. The rest is history."

We 3 brings its diverse backgrounds together to create a rather solid ensemble. Brown has toured the United States and Europe as a vocalist and has sung with the Pacific Northwest Ballet Theater, Edmundson has an extensive classical background and was a member of the Portland Opera Company for six years, and Evans has spent many years in theater and has toured the United States as director of the Missoula Children's Theater Company. White is associate music director for First Christian Church of Portland.

CDs and other products can be ordered from the Internet site www.we3.net, where you can download a sample of the group's work, or from P.O. Box 40668, Portland, OR 97240, where no samples are downloadable. Phone orders and bookings can be arranged at 503-331-8166, where—who knows?—you might be able to get a sample if you ask nicely.

Gay folk/rock artist Dave Hall also has a new release for the new year. *True*, his third CD, debuted Dec. 1 on Giuseppe Joe Records.

This mostly acoustic release features a couple of intriguing instrumental tracks as well as Hall's trademark Dylanesque sound. *True* is a look at life and death and exploits his gift as a poet.

He opens with a trilogy of songs exploring the death of a friend whose life was cut short, and he ends with another trilogy about death, but this one is that "of a life fulfilled." Both trilogies include a version of J.S. Bach's "Sheep May Safely Graze," contrapuntally infused with a melody of Hall's making.

The first version of this idea is called "Across Tiberias"—otherwise known as the Sea of Galilee; it's a song about crossing over to the other side. The second version, which is purely instrumental, skillfully invokes the ghost of the first trilogy.

The rest of the CD celebrates life, including a song for Hall's grandmother on her 90th and 100th birthdays, "You," and a humorous yet insightful look at belief in "God Is Wide." His music can be found at www.amazon.com, www.towerrecords.com or Ladyslipper Music, 800-634-6044, and MP3 clips can be downloaded from www.giuseppejoe.com.

LYNN THOMAS is a Portland free-lance writer and musician.



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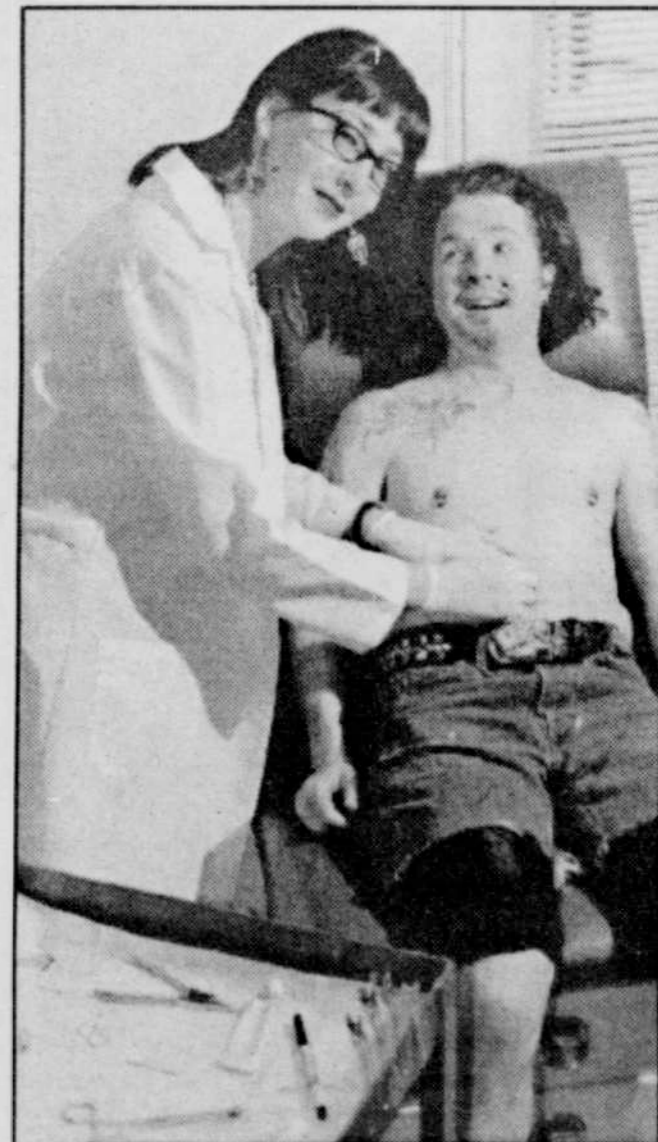
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