

# musicreview

Reviews by Christmas McCaughey

## phil wickham phil wickham

“For You I sing, I dance; Rejoice in this divine romance ...” The words of Phil Wickham’s song “Divine Romance” summarize the heart of his self-titled album nationally released earlier this year. A collection of intimately penned songs of worship and adoration, the album stands out for its musical complexity and Phil’s unforgettable vocal style. The multi-talented 22-year-old—who plays most of the instruments on the album—is a second-generation Calvary Chapel musician, offspring of pioneers of Christian music from the Jesus Movement. He showcases a combination of the powerful-yet-lilting vocal capabilities of mom Lisa Wickham, formerly of *Parable*, and the song-writing/guitar-playing chops of dad John Wickham, formerly of *Parable* and *The Way*, who is now a worship pastor at Maranatha Chapel, San Diego.



Growing up in the Word and in a home devoted to Jesus, Phil said: “I feel like my walk with the Lord has been incredibly gradual. At 12, I made

it more of a relationship.” Picking up the guitar around the same time, he soon began writing songs and leading worship for the youth group. After multiple requests, Phil, at age 18, recorded independent album *Give You My World* at the Wickham home. The Lord opened doors for leading worship at multiple Calvarys and venues around the world—including Creation Fest in the UK. Those two years helped prepare Phil for what he’s doing now—traveling the country and ministering in a different city almost every night since his self-titled album went national in April. “I do feel every step in the last five years has been preparatory for the next,” Phil said. “It’s been incredible, the people who have been touched through the music—even in other countries.” Through the whirlwind of ministry, Phil said, “I think the Lord is using this in my life to bring me closer to

Him. I’ve had to rely on Him more than ever before, making massive life decisions.”

### The Ministry

Along the way, Phil said, “He’s making me realize more and more the simple day-to-day communication with Him—just praying and talking with Him when I’m walking down the airport terminal or walking on stage with the guitar. Or working with people—not overlooking some kid who wants your autograph: to remember that every opportunity, even when you’re sick or tired, is an opportunity to minister.”

He cites Jesus’ example of ministry among multitudes: “Jesus in the Gospel was often swarmed with throngs of people. When one man would come up and say, ‘My daughter is dead, please heal her,’ or the woman with the issue of blood, He would stop and heal them. He was such a one-on-one individual, focused on that relationship with that one person.” He added, “I’m such an on-the-go kind of guy, to be able to look in someone’s eyes and listen and pray for them—it’s so simple: You just have to deny yourself and pour into specific people.”

The young musician does not take his calling lightly. “The massive honor and responsibility, that He would allow me to be in front of His flock and His bride—it’s an incredible privilege.” He hopes to remind believers how much they are loved by Christ. “We have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ... We can get bummed out that we’re falling short, sorry that we’re not as good as we should be—I went through that—but we forget how much Jesus loves us and wants to be with us.”

### The Music

With European-flavored vocals, a retro acoustic rhythm, and percussion with



photo by Ian Homer

Phil plays at a Creation Fest outreach in the UK.

slight bluegrass-Americana overtones, the song “Divine Romance” speaks of the intimate love relationship between Christ and the believer.

Phil’s style shifts for “Grace,” with both modern and ethereal overtones, poetic lyrics, and emotive singing. The song speaks of “the biggest underlying theme of the album—God’s bigness and worthiness and our smallness and humanity,” Phil said. “With forgiveness, and repentance, and acknowledging of sin—there’s hope and there’s no condemnation.” A favorite among fans, “Messiah” follows. “I love starting out with the idea of being desperate and needy—basically that we can’t do this on our own—and then saying, ‘Messiah, I need You.’” Another favorite is the seeker’s heart-cry, “Mystery”—which moves from seeking an answer to seeking to know more intimately the heart of God: “Here in the quiet, speak to me now ... Your gentle, sweet whispering. Break down the door; come inside ... I want to hear the thunder of who You are; I want to be captured inside the thunder of who You are ... to search out Your heart and all of Your mystery ... Let me see You.”

Phil is touring the country solo and with *MercyMe* and *Audio Adrenaline*; dates and locations are listed on his website.

[www.philwickham.com](http://www.philwickham.com)  
[www.myspace.com/philwickham](http://www.myspace.com/philwickham)

## crimson mercy luminous

“We just want to be real,” said Ramon Ivey, lead singer for *Crimson Mercy*, a five-person band based out of Southern California. Their heart is ministry to believers and unbelievers through live venues including youth camps, worship services, and the recent Summer Fest outreach, sponsored by CC Beachside.



Ramon’s brother, John Ivey, backs on vocals and plays acoustic guitar, while John’s wife Angela also supplies back-up vocals; all three are in the worship band together at CC Beachside, CA. Bass guitarist Omar Ramirez and drummer Dru Huston are also in worship ministry together at their local church.

“The Lord really brought the band together,” said Ramon. “In the same week, my brother John and Omar came to me separately and asked if we should start doing music again as a Christian band.” That was

nearly 10 years ago. For the past six years, the band has been playing at several ministry outreaches and churches.

“I think by being real in our music, we allow other people to be real—with themselves, with the Lord, and with other believers. We have seen the Lord use that realness to impact people—especially teenagers at some of the youth camps we’ve played at,” Ramon said. He recalled a young lady who had suffered a painful situation and came forward for help; at another camp, several kids accepted Christ. “We’ve played before a thousand people, and we’ve played at places where five people show up,” Omar said. “One thing we’ve learned is that God will accomplish His purpose regardless of our perceptions or our abilities.”

Their recent independent album, *Luminous*, has tracks that range from industrial worship to a classic rock style. In “Will I Find You,” beautiful three-part harmonies drive the catchy, rhythmic chorus in a heart-cry to God reminiscent of Psalm 139: “If I run to the end of world, will I find You there ... If I fall, fall off the end, will You be there?” Fans of industrial/acoustic style music will

enjoy “Visions,” with airy electric guitar swells and syncopated delays while Ramon delivers a soulful vocal style reminiscent of Jeremy Camp and Mac Powell. Musical arrangements on “Portion” include Dru on pan-flute and Omar on fretless bass.

Lyrics in “We Would See” bring the believer back to the heart of what’s important in the Christian walk: “We’re willing to settle for a religion when relationship takes too much time, and it always does ... We Would See You. We would see Jesus. If we could know the touch of His hands, if we could feel the hem of His garment, then we’d know the Son.” The band is working on a new album to be released in about a year.

[www.crimsonmercymusic.com](http://www.crimsonmercymusic.com)



Crimson Mercy

## mary barrett hymns 2—be still my soul

Those who love the depth and simplicity of the old hymns will likely enjoy Mary Barrett’s *Hymns 2: Be Still My Soul*. Keeping true to the original lyrics and arrangements of 12 favorite hymns, the largely acoustic album includes “Be Still My Soul,” “O Sacred Head Now Wounded,” “Come Ye Sinners Poor and Needy,” “Rock of Ages,” and “Sweet Hour of Prayer.”

During the recording, Mary said the Holy Spirit ministered to her in a special way: “I love it when the Spirit of God inhabits your praise right there in the studio!”



She calls this collection “more an acoustic project” than her previous albums. All tracks are driven by acoustic guitar, with some including mandolin, piano, or percussion. A mixture of moderately upbeat and mellow arrangements, the project seems best categorized

as a worship album. Faster tracks have a tempo akin to bluegrass/folk music—a well-done medley of “Leaning on the Everlasting Arms/I Stand Amazed in the Presence (How Marvelous);” “I Must Tell Jesus;” and “It Is Well With My Soul.” Others—including *Be Still My Soul*,” and “O Sacred Head Now Wounded”—have a gentle, intimate feel that draws the listener near the Lord. This is no surprise, as Mary has served as worship leader at Calvary Chapel Merritt Island, FL, since 1990.

“In my early years as a Christian, I remember struggling in finding my function in the body of Christ. I often felt guilty that I wasn’t like other believers who boldly went out passing out tracts and witnessing on the streets,” she said. “As I grew in my relationship with the Lord, I realized that my gift was in serving the church as a worship leader.”

Having been in music ministry for nearly 25 years, Mary recalled that she always seeks to give God the glory. She cited Jeremiah 45:5a as a key verse for any Christian musician, in which the Lord warns: “And do you



Mary Barrett leads worship in Africa.

seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them.” She added, “The music ministry is not mine but His. He has given me this one gift to use for His purposes.” A motto that she stands by is “God’s will—nothing more, nothing less, nothing else.”

Mary, whose parents are from the Philippines, spent much of her childhood there and accepted Christ in high school when a friend shared the Gospel with her. Mary’s ministry includes leading worship at women’s conferences and gatherings around the world. She lives with her husband, Joe Barrett, on Florida’s east coast.

[www.marybarrett.com](http://www.marybarrett.com)