

A blast from the past 40 years on

BEFORE Father Christmas there was a singer by the name of Garth Hewitt, or so it might seem. Few artists from the early days in what was loosely termed the "Jesus Music domain" remain. So just take this – Hewitt released his first album in 1973, "The Lion and the Lamb".

Strong

Today, more than 40 years later, here he comes, vocally loud and strong, still with a degree of anger in his lyrics, and the result is a cracking album entitled **Something for the Soul** (Ginger Dog Records). It's an album to tour with and recently in Ludgvan parish church in West Cornwall he gave an exemplary concert of around two hours long, which in part



Jesus Music and beyond

By Tony Jasper

showcased this recording. The "live" concert I heard did not see him with femme back-ups, whereas here on this album they are often a powerful plus, so markedly on the up-tempo par-excellence gospellish song, "The Chapel by the sea", or simply embellishing the overall sound on the splendid Christmas song, "Bethlehem is calling", that perhaps with a known music land singer could be a number one hit at this time of year. Another gospel-styled number is the somewhat stately "You'll lead me home" with piano, organ and drums, a few guitar licks,

not forgetting a solo voice back-up, giving it a quality feel.

Hewitt has toured the world and so, too, he has taken listeners into the "feeling" worlds of poverty, conflict, deprivation and disaster, not in some wishy-washy manner but rooted biblically from the prophetic standpoint of those people of God whose fiery outbursts leap out of Old Testament pages.

Hewitt's definite plus – and doubtless a major factor on his longevity – rests in his supreme ability to write catchy songs, whether reflective or stirring. Not all his

songs can occasion audience participation but when they do there is an effortless chorus and sing-a-long. Audience songs do not cry out for the complex, for lyrics that seem an essay, and Hewitt knows this only too well.

Remembered

The need is for something straightforward, easily remembered and underlaid with a tune that simply lodges in the brain, one you will find yourself humming and singing the next day. An example of this is his song of hope, "No injustice will last forever", or the rhythmic swaying song, "Nicaraguan Artisan", where Hewitt does a gentle push for Fairtrade. The chorus will be loved by the very young; it invites physical participation.

It's not difficult to realise that Hewitt has enormous respect for the non-violent protest of Dr Martin Luther King and that the great American, with his own walking with Jesus, has meant so much to the man who founded the Amos Trust in 1985 and has recently handed over the mantle to Chris Rose.



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Garth Hewitt, whose first album was released in 1973.

Hewitt remains closely associated with the charity that he founded. This album has the song "Tell 'em about the dream, Martin" – such a powerful number and vocalised with deep affection for the American who challenged the way society was organised for the white.

Hewitt varies pace well and when he breaks into an up-tempo mould it means a gorgeous song, as "Without a song". Here is a number that romps away and which utilises, as elsewhere, his proficiency on mouth-harp. He even has a lyric to encourage those who might wonder a little whether justice will come.

Fighting

"Steadfast love" gets a strong and sturdy tune and Hewitt commands. The title song is hard-edged and a fighting spirit pervades Garth's memorable delivery. In melodic terms the top cut is "Beautiful resistance" with its evocation of passive resistance and its direct reference to the crucifixion of Jesus.

The only track lacking a little is the opening cut, "The welcome house of God". The song itself is fine but it needs a better arrangement and it's not really an opening number, or the tune is not, while the words have an introduction feel.

Oh, there is the fine folk-style singer Beth Rowley on three of the songs.

Those with memories of the band After The Fire will note the name of Peter Banks among the back-up vocalists,

or, at least I assume it is the same singer. Hewitt's prophetic, social and political shouts should be mandatory hearing for many JM artists who make the faith so small and severely reduce the message.

He says "Just to live is holy." This album makes for an excellent Christmas present. Infact it should be a "must" purchase.

After last month's superb releases from Leonard Cohen and Lucinda Williams, this reviewer has not been forking out hard cash for anything of a religious or spiritual nature in the "beyond" – my expenditure has been on several much-reduced price albums, one of which has been **The Very Best of Judy Collins** (Elektra) that, apart from the superb song "Who knows where the time goes" (once given a memorable vocal by the late Sandy Denny), does contain the gospel song she took to number one, namely "Amazing Grace".

Modern

"Silent Night" is given a modest 21st-century makeover in a new recording by the winner of Britain's Got Talent, Paul Potts. A new chorus and verse has been written by popular JM artists Ben Cantelon and Nick Herbert. Its release stems from the partnership of Integrity Music with Hope Together on their 400-plus "Silent Night Carols" events happening up and down the nation this Christmas which commemorate the truce of World War One and the brief coming together of British and German soldiers as they sang "Silent Night" and played football together.

In a spate of originality, Integrity have called the new version "Silent Night" (Christ the Saviour Is Born). The rich voice of Potts carries the song well, although the backing has some irritating drum work.

The song is released via iTunes this Sunday (December 14). Profits will go to support the work of the charities Tearfund and the Royal British Legion.

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