

michael W. smith

G L O R Y

Even as defining as his platinum pop and worship albums have become, there is yet another musical side to **Michael W. Smith** that is as passionate and creative. Ask the multiple GRAMMY Award winner, whose songs have changed so many peoples' lives, to discuss his favorite film scores, and something changes within him. Like a sports fan rattling off player stats, he runs through a list of movies and the composers who made them come alive; testifying to the innate spiritual power of wordless music alone.

"I got hooked by watching *Raiders of the Lost Ark* in the theater like twenty-eight times," he remembers. "I'd never heard a soundtrack like that—so epic. I became a serious fan of John Williams, who also did *Star Wars*, *Saving Private Ryan* and *Harry Potter*. I could hum something from everything he's done. I also really like Hans Zimmer (*The Lion King*), James Newton Howard (*The Fugitive*) and Ennio Morricone (*The Mission*)."

More than any other mainstream Christian artist, Michael has certainly broadened his own genre's listening ear. Between 1999's compelling *This Is Your Time* record and 2001's much needed *Worship* set (released on September 11), he made the instrumental effort, *Freedom*, which has sold more than 500,000 copies. It's also the project many fans want more of and ask about most often: *When are you going to make another one?*

The answer is now. **Glory**, Smith's twenty-third career album, feeds the enthusiasm its predecessor stirred and soundly exceeds expectations. A sweeping cinematic statement rich in melodies, emotional range, and musical twists, it was born at a piano in Tennessee then completed with a 71-piece symphony orchestra in England at AIR Studios, where soundtracks for *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* were also done.

In keeping with the very nature of **Glory**, Smitty lets the new music speak for itself, by and large remaining open to a listener's personal interpretation of each grand selection.

"People said *Freedom* had something about it that made them feel good, that it was a spiritual experience," he says. "I don't know if I could explain all that. I just know I went down into a deeper place writing those songs, and it has happened again with **Glory**."

Smith believes words aren't always necessary to convey meaning. Sometimes expressions of praise are better stated through other means.

"To mention another great movie, there's a famous quote from *Chariots of Fire* that I could never forget, because it truly resonated in my heart," he explains. "The film's hero Eric Liddell says of his relationship with God, 'When I run I feel His pleasure.' And when I play the piano I feel God's pleasure; it's just what I'm made to do. We all have gifts, and we all have our story, and this is just my gift."

And it's a gift that **Michael W. Smith** enthusiasts will enjoy like never before on **Glory**, a collection highlighting the beautiful depths of the artist's unspoken inner life. For music lovers who think beyond genre, it's also a fascinating window into his creative process.

Written and dramatically arranged by Michael, then brought into symphonic majesty with producer/conductor David Hamilton, *Glory* starts with a self-titled overture that sets the album's tone as coming from a spiritual journeyman who is a heartfelt countryman and dedicated family man as well. The opening solo piano part soon blossoms into a blend of tinkling bells, strings and brass that Smith says was influenced by Williams' *E.T.* score.

"The Patriot" follows, an Americana melody lifted by woodwinds and flutes that stirs images of bravery and a victorious homecoming. Similarly, "Heroes" was inspired by the sacrifices U.S. soldiers have made throughout history and are still making today.

Further in, family and friends play into *Glory* on several occasions. "Whitaker's Wonder," named after Michael's grandson, who is named after his grandfather's famous middle initial, is perfectly kidlike. Plucking away in a dreamy style comparable to Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*, Smitty says he wrote the piece in one fun swoop and credits Hamilton for the unexpected key modulations and engaging time signature changes.

"Tribute" was written to honor the sixtieth anniversary of President George and Barbara Bush who first heard Michael perform it for them at the White House. Along those lines, he wrote "The Romance" and the elegant, sweeping "Forever" for his wife, Debbie, honoring their thirty years of marriage.

"The Blessing" matches the spirit of a book Smith co-wrote entitled *A Simple Blessing*. The song is a soaring reminder that music is its own prayer to God, and that a wordless melody can still evoke a powerful sense of thanksgiving in a listener's heart.

"I don't think life has ever been any better; it's the best ever right now," he says with a calm gratefulness. "I still wrestle demons like we all do—things that control us instead of us controlling them—but that's just life, and hopefully it gets better. The good news is that I'm starting to figure it out."

You can hear distinctly trying moments of the Christian journey on "Glory Battle," a rhythmically driven tune depicting spiritual warfare with an intense piano riff that Smith describes as "*Gladiator* meets *Braveheart*." He confesses to "a little sadness" in the melody of "Joy Follows Suffering," which would have fit *The Godfather*.

The mood is duly brighter on "Redemption," an upbeat classical selection that again employs what Smitty calls "a little John Williams trick . . . isn't that fun?" where a bold key change suddenly elicits a strong emotional response in the listener. His musical passion is likewise evident on the cascading "Atonement," where he shifts the feeling back down toward the end by breaking into an entirely new piece of music—a technique Hamilton suggested that was often used by the pianist Frederic Chopin.

"That's the stuff I would have known a long time ago if I'd practiced more," he laughs.

While the fact that Michael imagined each note heard on *Glory* clearly highlights his sophisticated talent as a serious musician, he isn't planning on taking the place of Williams or any other Hollywood film scoring legend anytime soon. His first love was the pop song, figuring out The Beatles' "Hey Jude" by ear as a child. Soon enough he would stop formal piano lessons, join bands, and move from West Virginia to Nashville, becoming a Christian artist whose dozens of No. 1 hits and fifteen million albums sold would impact a worldwide audience that could never be calculated.

“I’ve been given this amazing platform to sing about the truth, and I have to stay that course, especially in terms of doing concerts” he says. “Touring with Amy Grant this past year, we would meet people who—and I say this with complete humility—felt we were just part of the fabric of their lives growing up. It’s very emotional to see them respond to certain songs. It’s almost like: *I was a part of that? It’s like a dream.*”

Glory closes with one of those certain songs, a breathtaking instrumental version of “Agnus Dei” that simply explodes in glory to God.

“If I had to give you one word to describe this record, it would be ‘journey,’” Smith concludes. “Everyone is on a journey, and I love how the journey ends on this album.”

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