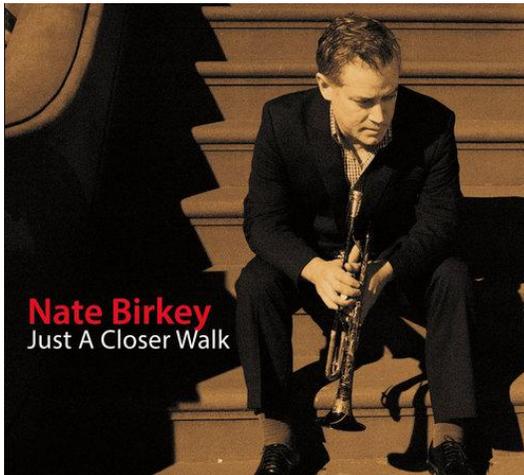




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Nate Birkey releases ninth album, *Just A Closer Walk*

NYC-based jazz trumpeter, vocalist, composer Nate Birkey has built a solid reputation for creating a modernizing “mainstream” musical voice, steeped in subtle swing and expressive lyricism while making careful, tasteful detours into other rhythms and genres. He steps into some terrain both new and old by offering fresh yet traditional approaches to the realm of gospel music and spirituals on his latest album *Just a Closer Walk*, for Household Ink

Records. Recorded live with a single stereo microphone in the sanctuary of St. Michaels Church in Isla Vista, CA, the inspiring all-instrumental song set features the ripe and empathetic work of his “west coast” quintet, with pianist Jamieson Trotter, tenor saxophonist Tom Buckner, bassist Jim Connolly and drummer Peter Buck.

This isn’t the first time Birkey has followed a particular conceptual path on an album: he focused his musical attentions on earlier albums with the deceptively simple, self-descriptive titles, 2001’s “*Ballads*” and 2008’s “*Christmas*.” The foundation of Birkey’s approach is personalized “straight ahead” jazz, but his broad taste for New Orleans, Latin, Country and other genres can also be heard on earlier albums - *Indelibly You* (1998), *The Mennonite* (2001), *Shortest Day* (2004) and *Almost Home* (2008).

Just a Closer Walk, similarly, stokes the long tradition of a gospel influence in jazz while adding some twists of Birkey’s own devising. Jazz classics with a gospel pedigree include the opener “Cristo Redentor,” the Duke Pearson tune made famous by trumpeter Donald Byrd. A New Orleans ‘Second Line’ groove percolates on his arrangement of “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” while a brass chorale effect lends a hushed, spiritualized glow to the 19th century hymn “O Sacred Head, Now Wounded” - one of the favorite hymns of Birkey’s parents to whom the album is dedicated.

That brief, sanctuary-suitable track segues gracefully into the title hymn, “Just a Closer Walk with Thee,” and an improvisatory romp for the quintet. The album closes with a nod to the great African-American spirituals repertoire, “Soon Ah Will Be Done,” by which time we’re true believers in the project’s musical mission, regardless of one’s link to the religious affiliations involved.

Just a Closer Walk is another strong addition to a fascinating discography and an ongoing musical adventure for Birkey.

“Birkey exemplifies in music what the American poet, James Wright, called ‘the pure clear word’—honest, heartfelt expression that never lapses into sentimentality or self-pity.”

Victor Schermer, *All About Jazz*

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Links:

www.natebirkey.com

www.householdink.com/natebirkey.htm

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The press notes:

"Nate Birkey, he of mysterious charisma, subtle gossamer trumpet lines and understated voice, hunches over the microphone and leans into his phrases, shutting out the world."

-Josef Woodard, *LA Times*

“Too many jazz recordings today reflect attempts to squeeze the last drop of virtuosity and clever turns of phrase from the proud legacy of the idiom, mixing it with various flavors of classical and world music. This album is instead straightforwardly a man's expression of who he is, and that is the true essence of jazz. Eminently listenable, *Almost Home* is also a valid musical expression of the human heart.”

-Vic Schermer, *All About Jazz*