



DAVE WANG

Stepping outside the comfort zone

In a recent Canadian *Catholic Register* article, Christian music was dismissed, for the most part, by Jennifer Harris, a professor of Christianity and Culture at St. Michael's College in Toronto, as having "numbing similarity" and "banality of both the music and lyrics." I encountered similar nega-

check out an online movie called "Before the Music Dies" which is available for \$2.99 at www.bside.com. There is a fascinating clip where they take a talentless beautiful 17 year old and create a music video that sounds and looks very hot, by judicious use of modern tools like Autotune.

the recordings, the song selection is inundated with covers of older songs, particularly from the Glory and Praise catalog. In some cases, I have actually found it difficult to figure out which artist's song I was listening to when I programmed the songs on random as



tivity in several online chats that I have had with numerous Catholics who are music fans but not fans of the Christian music genre. Now, in our defense, many artists in the secular music scene can also be described by the same adjectives. No one could ever convince me of the artistic merit of Britney Spears or Hillary Duff. As well, there are some innovative Christian musicians but one has to dig deeper into the Christian music scene. However, this is no different than the secular scene, where true talent is often hidden by a publicity machine that can take a pretty girl with no voice and make her a pop icon. If you don't believe that this can be done,

Now, that being said, this perception affects Catholic musicians in a very big way. Whereas evangelical Christians will support secular music sound-alikes, Catholic listeners have never had a culture of "pop music prohibition." Thus, Catholic artists have to have radio-friendly production quality recordings right out of the gate. I am proud to say the production of recent recordings has given me cause for optimism. Many of the recent recordings I have been sent are very well produced. In fact, I have been recently sent a large number of female artists' CDs and all definitely pass the muster. However, not everything is rosy. In several of

they all had a sameness to their sound and approach. In other words, the adjectives used by Prof. Harris rang just a little too true. It is true that these female artists have probably found a niche that supports their ministries well. However, given the number of artists who have taken similar approaches, I am quite alarmed. If we want to present a healthy alternative to the Britney Spears and Amy Winehouses of the world, we need more originality in both the song selections and arrangements. Given the sad state of secular music, we have an opportunity not just to emulate, but to present artistic excellence that hurdles over the secular and into the divine. †