Opinion
Culture



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by Jessica Gerhardt

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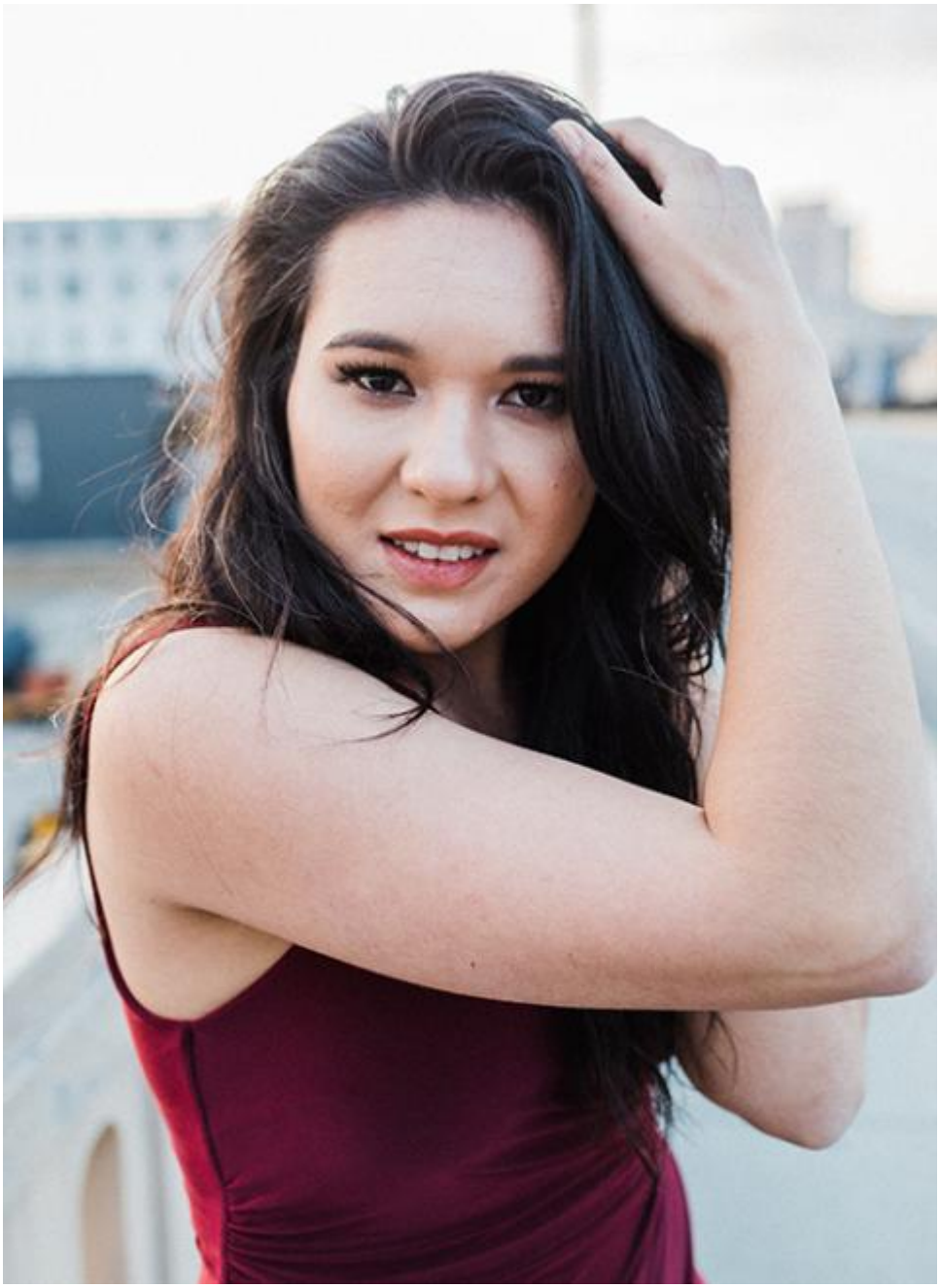
March 4, 2022

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I'm a Catholic and a singer-songwriter living and working in Los Angeles, California. I've been pursuing music now for about a decade and while I feel very much that I'm in my vocation when I'm creating and releasing my own music and performing, I have found tremendous fulfillment building community among and promoting the gifts and talents of other artists. I love hosting showcases, bringing artists together on projects, connecting artists with resources and with one another and just doing what I can to amplify their voices and talents so that the world can be blessed by them.

Throughout my life, my own creativity has been supported and encouraged by so many people, and I desire to pay it forward to fellow artists.

Some of my favorite music artists that I've gotten to know just happen to be Catholic too. I really admire when art points to the transcendent without necessarily having to be on-the-nose worship music. I wanted to highlight a few incredibly gifted artists who create music that is good, true and beautiful across a number of genres. Some of the music uses Catholic imagery or language in unique and poetic or symbolic ways, while other music doesn't explicitly use any Catholic symbolism, but is still rich with meaning and just dang catchy.



Tara Honda (Justin Critz)

Tara Honda (pop)

Tara first began building a more public following when she had a very successful audition on American Idol in 2015. Her powerful, smooth voice, characterized by the perfect blend of grit, soul and vocal control, is a treat to listen to. If you like Carole King, Sara Bareilles and Taylor Swift, you'll love Tara Honda.

She's a prolific songwriter with honest, vulnerable lyrics paired with earworm pop hooks. Though she's been singing for a number of years in venues, parishes, wineries and choral ensembles, she only recently released her debut single "Wild" in January 2022. This song will most definitely get stuck in your head (and will probably make you want to visit the City of Angels.)

To connect with more of Tara's music, check out her website, or follow her on Spotify , Apple Music or the music platform of your choosing. She's also active on Instagram, and in addition to posting videos featuring her gorgeous voice, you'll be blessed by her daily snaps of flowers, trees and gorgeous skies that help you to remember to stay present and find God in nature.

Currently, Tara is working on another single to be released later this year, and she's planning a trip to Nashville to work on production for future song releases in 2022.

Sean Pawling (indie)

Drawing comparisons to Jason Mraz, Cake and the Carpenters, Sean Pawling crafts soulful, intricate indie tunes that'll stay in your head and your heart. Sean is not only a talented singer-songwriter, but also an accomplished trombone player. Sean's debut EP "Inner Child" just recently celebrated its 10th birthday, establishing his longevity as an artist. He has since released two full length albums, "Eye for an Eiger " (2014) and "Sunsinking" (2019). Sean's music is composed with powerful horn arrangements and genre-defying instrumentals spanning '70s style grooves to upbeat pop to cinematic and brooding. His smooth tenor vocals, adorned with eloquent runs and lilts, are so soothing to listen to.



Sean Pawling (Chris Rasmussen)

Additionally, Sean is a part of an electro-funk trio called Non-Funkible. They released their debut single last year, "Swipe You Right," along with an amusing music video featuring boxy robots trying to find a love connection using a dating app. Sean's trio is working on another single to be released later this year.

Find Sean Pawling's music on Spotify, Apple Music, Bandcamp and all other platforms. Follow Sean on Instagram for clever trombone solos, adorable father and daughter snaps and occasional cockatiel videos.



Kateri (Yubicella Brito)

Kateri (indie, jazz)

Kateri is an accomplished teaching artist, singer-songwriter, pianist, ukuleist and playwright extraordinaire. Her debut EP "Ultraviolet Garden" has Fiona Apple/Norah Jones energy with its slow, sultry vocals and moody lyrics. The EP showcases Kateri's

vocal breadth, vulnerable songwriting and instrumental fluency.

Her sophomore album "Psalms for Inside Times" accompanies a one-woman musical that explores themes of religious identity and self-exploration in light of experiences of spiritual and clergy abuse, and how those experiences impacted the protagonist's relationships and faith understandings. The story follows Anak (pronounced ah-NAWK, "child" in Tagalog) and her journey to find the answer to the question: "Were we loved before we knew ourselves?" The musical was reviewed in FemCatholic and features an interview with Kateri about the inspiration behind "Psalms for Inside Times," as well as an exploration of her identity as a Filipina American Catholic feminist and artist. The album and accompanying lyric book include explicit language and triggering content that isn't kid friendly, but it can serve as a resource to help families find ways to talk about healthy touch, boundaries and communication and prevent future abuse.

Outside of her own artistic projects, Kateri has extensive experience as a music educator, working with all ages, and has developed a creative music learning platform called Music Is Easy, where she presents simple lessons on various terms and music theory concepts in collaborations with a number of other indie musicians.

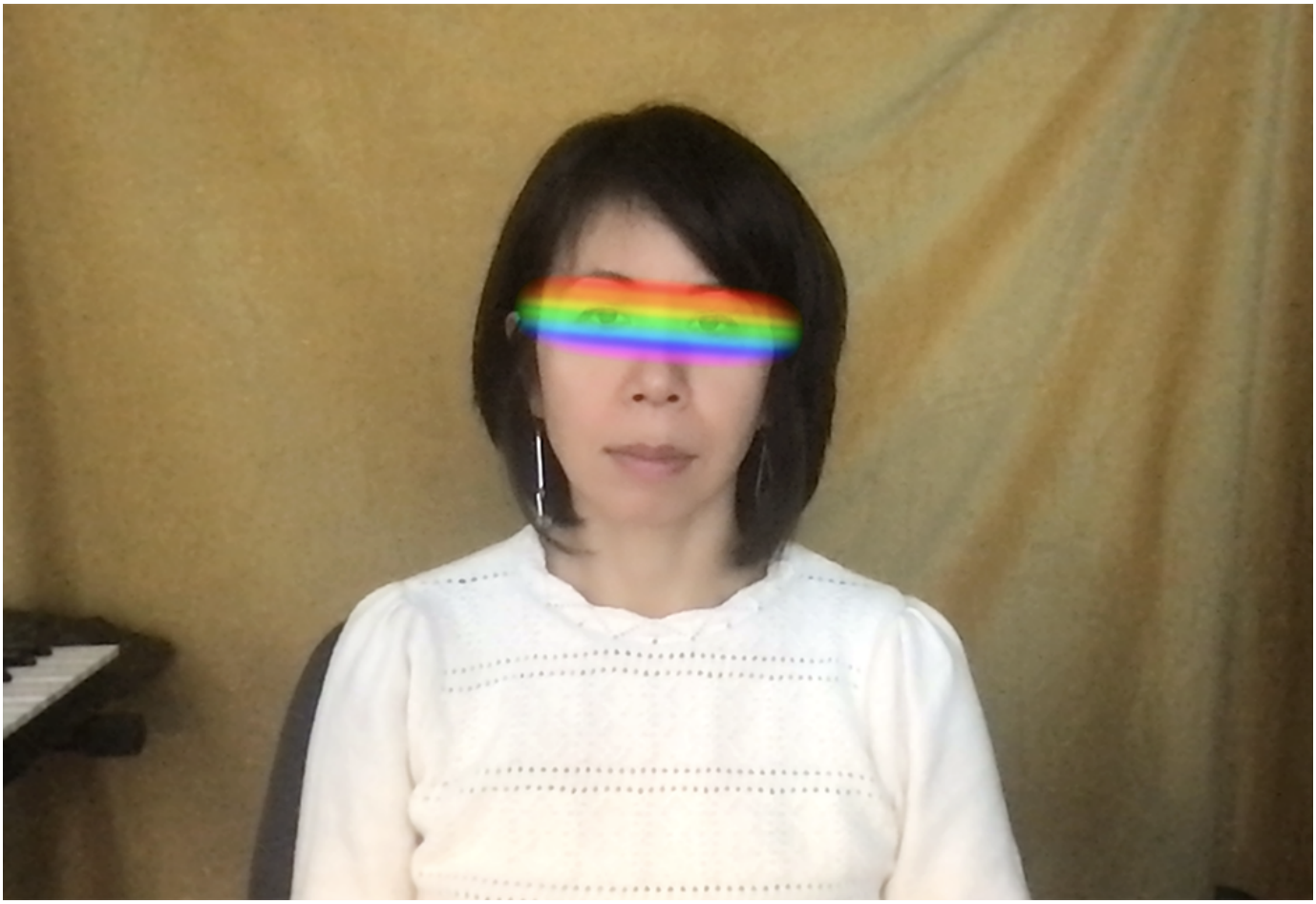
You can learn more about Kateri on her website, as well as listen to her music on Spotify, Apple Music, Bandcamp and all other platforms.

Fascinoma (anti-folk, indie)

Alanna Lin Ramage is the frontwoman and songwriter behind the folk-pop group Fascinoma. Alanna is also known as "Chairmeowww" and she identifies as a "Cat-holic" artist. Ramage's songs are fun, quirky, honest and free-spirited, colored by eclectic arrangements and her gentle vocals. Think Regina Spektor, Japanese Breakfast and Cat Power. Her stage presence is no exception, bringing in humor and performance art — she is quite the spectacle. She is authentic and her ideas and musings come right out of her mind and into her songs through inventive melodies and poetry. Her collaborators and accompanists are equally brilliant and bring her songs to life through intricate and vibrant arrangements.

Fascinoma's discography is robust. Her song "I'm Walking This Road Because You Stole My Car (Don't Go)" gained her notoriety after being featured on the TV show "American Dad." Her debut, self-titled album "Fascinoma" was released in 2008, followed by "Emergency Songs" (a collaboration with Monk Turner) in 2011, a

Beatles Cover Album "Don't Let Me Down" in 2017, and her latest record, "Now Now Chairmeowww" in 2021, exclusively on Bandcamp.



Alanna Lin Ramage of Fascinoma (Provided photo)

While her musical stylings land her among many art rock, anti-folk style artists who aren't especially religious, her latest record outs her as a Catholic, opening with "Hail Holy Queen," in which she invokes Our Lady through the words of the traditional prayer, asking for her help in these crazy times. "Sacred Heart" is another track that earnestly pleads to God: "take this weary soul of mine" and "in your love may my love grow." A number of the other tracks on the song are deeply reflective and poetic, calling to mind universal experiences of longing, hoping and seeking that make this record accessible to Catholic and non-Catholic listeners alike.

Find Fascinoma on Bandcamp, Spotify, Apple Music and all other platforms. Follow her on Instagram for music, writing, performance art and her adorable pup, Penny.



Merlot Embargo (Philip Eastman)

Merlot Embargo (indie-pop)

Merlot Embargo is a husband-and-wife duo fronted by singer-songwriter Scarlet Gross and guitarist-songwriter Geoff Gross. Their music is colored by indie-pop influences characterized by Geoff's catchy guitar hooks and Scarlet's powerful, sultry

vocals, which show hints of her musical theater background and evoke Gwen Stefani meets Barbra Streisand. In 2014, the couple walked away from a nearly fatal car accident that left them wondering: If we had died, what would we have regretted? It then became clear that they both felt called to pursue their own music with this one, wild life. Writing and producing out of a home studio, and collaborating with a number of fellow talented musicians to fill out their sound, Merlot Embargo was born.

Their debut album "Don't Look Back" (2016) features heartfelt songs with encouraging and inspiring tracks like "Head Above The Water" and "All Who Are Lost ," and boasts a breadth of genres ranging from bluesy pop rock to pensive ballads. Since then, Merlot Embargo has released a number of singles, both covers and originals, including "Let The Light In," (2017) "Georgia," "She" and "Here's To Another Year" in 2018. They released "Most of Us", "Don't Cry" and "Cruel Summer" in 2019, "One Day" (2020), and most recently "Oh Dear, What Can The Matter Be" (2021). In addition to playing out with their own tunes, Scarlet and Geoff are accomplished musicians, performing covers for a number of live events, and are also worship leaders.

Merlot Embargo is hard at work on their second album and they are planning to drop a few of the singles from the record this year. You can find their music on Spotify, Apple Music, Bandcamp, their website and all other platforms. Follow their Instagram for live videos, honest reflections, their pups Mulder & Scully and cute candid family pics with their adorable daughter.

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Paul Deiss Smith II (folk, Christian)

Paul Deiss Smith II is a singer-songwriter whose delicate voice, raw acoustic arrangements and gentle guitar playing bring to mind Sufjan Stevens, John Michael Talbot and Iron & Wine. His 2021 debut full-length album, "The Pious Harp for The Weary Soul," moves the listener to stillness and quietude. An acoustic guitar and voice trio (featuring Arend Lee Jessurun and Zack Caplinger), string quartet and trumpet adorn Paul's tender, intimate, contemporary hymns.



Paul Deiss Smith II (Christopher Smith)

Paul's acoustic-folk songwriting is deeply intertwined with his Catholic spirituality, and he advocates the power of true rest with his new music on this debut record. His song "Giving Tree," which he released initially as a single, is a nostalgic tune filled with imagery of childhood and love for his family as a blessing. The accompanying music video for "Giving Tree" is equally as beautiful, featuring candid moments with relatives and gorgeous natural beauty in his hometown, inviting the viewer to almost feel like a part of their family. "2 Timothy 1: 6-8" is an abstract, mystical rendition of the Scripture invoking the Holy Spirit with contemplative guitar and guttural trumpet call and response. This album is a true example of ministry and artistry combined.

You can listen to the record on Spotify, Apple Music, his website and all other platforms. Paul's second record is fully written and is in preproduction. Follow Paul on Instagram for updates on upcoming releases and tour dates.

Paradox (hip-hop)

Matthew Klassen aka Paradox is an incredibly prolific hip-hop artist as well as a high school theology teacher. His catalog is extensive with 6 full-length albums and 25 singles, dating back as far as 2006. Paradox is also one of the most collaborative artists I know, having worked with dozens of fellow hip-hop artists and singer-songwriters featured on his songs, engineers and producers including Imperial and ReFlex the Architect. The lyrical content of his tracks consists of heartfelt storytelling and witty wordplay touching on topics like institutional racism, classism, environmentalism and other dignity of life issues.



Paradox (Jon P. Straface)

His commitment to Catholic social teaching is evident in his writing. His latest single release "Law of Gravity," produced by ReFlex and featuring Dillon, addresses the history of oppression in America and corporate greed. The track's hook, "the bigger they are the harder they fall," highlights the way history repeats itself when oppressors and oppressive systems inevitably collapse.

Paradox is preparing to release a nine-song EP called "Enough," another collaboration with Reflex in the next few months. If you dig Propaganda, Common and Eminem, you'll vibe with Paradox. To check out his music, listen on Spotify, Apple Music, Bandcamp, his website and all other platforms.

Diana Torrefranca (pop)

Diana is a singer-songwriter and worship musician from Southern California with a background in youth ministry and teaching. She has sung for a number of retreats, youth conferences, and served as a regular cantor for Mass for almost a decade. After serving as a full-time youth minister for over 5 years, she shifted her focus to music and her small business, Kindness & Koffee: an Etsy shop where she sells stickers, keychains and other cute accessories with uplifting and encouraging messages promoting faith and mental health.



Diana Torrefranca (Evan Guston)

Her debut music releases include two singles "Days Like This" and "Sweet Valentine," upbeat, acoustic tunes that evoke Kina Grannis, Colbie Caillat and Meiko. Her gentle, melodious voice and acoustic guitar and ukulele playing add to sweet tunes that are perfect for a mellow mood or a sunny day drive.

Follow Diana on Instagram at @dianatorrefranca and @kindnessandkoffee for positive reminders and beautiful designs. Find Diana's music on Spotify, Apple Music and all other platforms.

I hope you enjoy these artists as much as I do. Follow them, support their releases, buy their merch and share their music with your friends. Also check out this Spotify playlist of all the artists in the article. If you know of other hidden gem Catholic artists you think deserve some recognition, send me your recs. I love discovering new music and supporting fellow artists.