The 33 1/3
B-SIDES

new essays by 33 1/3 authors on beloved and underrated albums

edited by WILL STOCKTON AND D. GILSON

BLOOMSBURY

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PREFACE

"I feel like B-sides are always better," Alicia Keys told *Rolling Stone* in 2005, "no matter whose record it is."[1] This anthology of crisp, compact chapters from previous 33 1/3 authors focuses on B-sides: albums these writers found better, best, bad, worth batting an eye over, or better yet, worth another spin. We asked the writers included here to think about a different future for their 33 1/3 contribution: an album they might have written about, but which didn't make the cut.

For our previous contribution to the 33 1/3 series, we wrote about a band—dc Talk—central to our young adulthood, and about a genre—contemporary Christian music—largely unexplored within the terrain of 1990s alternative rock criticism and the 33 1/3 series. Yet before we hit on writing *Jesus Freak*, we almost wrote separately on different albums. Will mapped out 30,000 words on Prince's multi-disc *Emancipation*, and D. brainstormed a pop-culture memoir that pivoted around Christina Aguilera's Spanish-language album *Mi Reflejo*. To us, these albums were B-sides: records that didn't distinguish their artist's careers, but which were important to Prince and Aguilera fanatics like us. In other words, these albums were superfluous to the rest of the world, but strangely essential to us as obsessive music consumers.

This collection brings together members of the 33 1/3 family who, like us, wanted to riff on albums they believe deserve a place in the series, albums that deserve a second glance. Charged with writing short chapters on their own B-sides, the authors here address the concept with an array of approaches reflecting the range and diversity of the 33 1/3 series itself. In keeping with the conventional notion of the B-side as an obscurity, something forgotten or appended, most of the albums found here have flown under the critical radar. But the use of the B-side itself expands outward from there to include albums of our adolescence refound ("Juvenilia"); albums relegated to the margins of a genre, a subculture, or an artist's catalog ("Marginalia"); and albums appended to or commemorating other events, like concerts or films ("Memorabilia"). Eschewing the generic organization of the albums discussed here, we honor our contributors' variety of perspectives through this three-part thematic organization. In turn, we hope the volume produces a notion of the B-side as capacious as the series itself.

In bringing this volume to print, we thank not only the authors, but also our dutiful Bloomsbury editor, Leah Babb-Rosenfeld. She challenged us to think deeply about the B-side, and gave us the breadth to do so. Thanks as well to Amy Martin, Deborah Maloney, and the anonymous copy editors and typesetters who made this sprawling volume possible. We surely tested their patience.

— Will Stockton & D. Gilson

INTRODUCTION: SUPERFLUOUS, REDUNDANT, ENDURING—PRINCE'S *EMANCIPATION* (1996)

Will Stockton

The Artist Formerly Known as Prince—hereafter referred to, for simplicity's sake, as Prince—released three albums in 1996. Or maybe two, if soundtracks don't count. Or maybe six, if a triple album counts as three. The soundtrack to the Spike Lee film *Girl 6* (itself a superfluity in Lee's catalog) appeared first in March. The inclusions are mostly vintage Prince: "Girls & Boys" (from 1986's *Parade*), "Erotic City" (the B-side to 1984's "Let's Go Crazy"), "How Come U Don't Call Me Anymore" (the B-side to 1982's "1999"), and "Adore," "Hot Thing," and "The Cross" (all from 1987's *Sign o' the Times*). The songs from Prince's side projects—The Family's "The Screams of Passion" (1985), Vanity 6's "Nasty Girl" (1982), and The New Power Generation's "Count the Days" (1995)—as well as newer songs like NPG's eponymous "Girl 6," "She Spoke 2 Me," and "Don't Talk 2 Strangers" (which Chaka Khan does better on her Prince-assisted 1998 album *Come 2 My House*)—nestle in as filler.

Featuring, by contrast, all new and previously unreleased material, *Chaos and Disorder* appeared a few months later in July. Relatively few people noticed. Prince popped up on the *Late Show with David Letterman* and NBC's *Today* to play "Dinner with Delores," the album's first and only single. But he otherwise refused to promote the album. *Chaos and Disorder* peaked at number twenty-six on the US *Billboard* charts, a notable decline from *The Gold Experience*'s number two peak in 1995. Reviews were also conflicted. Robert Christgau christened *Chaos and Disorder* "a guitar album for your earhole" and awarded it an A–.[1] *Rolling Stone*'s Ernest Hardy called the album "a collection of polished demos" from an artist with nothing left to say and awarded it two stars.[2]

Prince had his reasons for lying low and slipping *Chaos and Disorder* quietly onto music-store shelves. He wanted to move on—musically, yes (he was always trying to move on musically)—but more immediately from his record company, Warner Brothers, whom Prince rather audaciously claimed had turned him into a slave.[3] This claim smacked of the absurd for an artist who just one year previously, and despite declining sales in the late 1980s and early 1990s, had extended his contract with Warner Brothers to the tune of $100 million. But Warner Brothers refused to release music at the rate the notoriously prolific Prince demanded. Under the terms of the new contract, Warner Brothers also claimed ownership over all the music—the master tapes—Prince had produced for the label. Almost as soon as he'd signed the contract, Prince regretted it. He began performing with the word "slave" scrawled on his cheek. Abandoning the name

"Prince" as a Warner Brothers product, he bewildered the press by changing his name to a now infamous glyph. However misguided this maneuver was as a legal strategy—for the name change did not in fact free Prince from the terms of the contract—he began to focus all his energies on emancipation.[4]

When Ernest Hardy describes *Chaos and Disorder* as "a halfhearted transaction from a self-pitying artist,"[5] he is not entirely wrong. The packaging itself reads as an afterthought. A scant, bitter, three-page fold out, featuring images of a cash-stuffed syringe, a toilet, a vault lock, and the Bible, passes for the liner notes. Under the track listing, Prince appended a note legible as an apology for the album's shoddiness: "Originally intended 4 private use only, this compilation serves as the last original material recorded by [the Artist] 4 warner brothers records—may u live 2 see the dawn." Downgraded by its creator from a proper album to a "compilation" like the soundtrack for Spike Lee's flop comedy, *Chaos and Disorder* lands like a collection of B-sides delivered to Warner Brothers in coerced fulfillment of a contractual obligation.

Chaos and Disorder isn't awful for being that. My assessment leans more towards Christgau's than Hardy's. *Chaos and Disorder* is a respectable little rock record—brisk and gritty, deftly inflected with rap and hip-hop. The title track offers a garage-rock rewrite of the world-weary "Sign o' the Times." A blistering blues guitar drives "Zanalee." Prince seemed especially fond of the album's second track, "I Like It There," and performed the song often in the years that followed. Is *Chaos and Disorder* tossed off? Sure. Half-hearted? Only in terms of Prince's public disinterest in this Warner Brothers product. But the supposedly enslaved, self-pitying Prince remained a wicked musician. Consequently, even *Chaos and Disorder*'s lyrical missteps, like "I rock, therefore I am," arrive on earworm melodies.

Prince's delivery of *Chaos and Disorder*, as well as a second compilation called *The Vault: Old Friends 4 Sale* (not released until 1999), concluded the artist's contractual relationship with Warner Brothers. In November 1996, he celebrated this conclusion with the release of the triple-album *Emancipation*. The album constituted a labor of love in several senses. It commemorated not only his freedom from Warner Brothers, but also his marriage to Mayte Garcia and the impending arrival of their son Amiir (who would tragically die from Pfeiffer syndrome six days after his October 1996 birth). Whereas *Chaos and Disorder* ran a mere forty minutes, *Emancipation* extended to 180—each sixty-minute disc containing twelve songs. Whereas *Chaos and Disorder* tracked its songs as a "compilation," the meticulous cut of each *Emancipation* disc gave the appearance of expert album curation. And whereas the blue-and-black cover of *Chaos and Disorder* signaled its artist's angry subjugation to the label by planting a shoe print over a cut-out of Prince's eye, the sunny orange cover of *Emancipation* joyously boasted its creator's freedom with a pair of fists snapping apart shackles. Sitting side by side on the shelf with the summer release, *Emancipation* announced—as the far more robust liner note booklet confirms—that the listener had now lived "2 see the dawn."

If three albums seem excessive, superfluous, that was the point. Given the gradual dip in sales of new Prince records following the 1988 release of *Lovesexy*, Warner had worried about market oversaturation, about flooding the market with *too much*, and thereby diminishing the profitability and impact of any one product. With *Chaos and Disorder*, Prince's response to the label's request for restraint seemed deliberately perverse: he gave them a collection of songs he never intended to release.[6] The Artist coded *Emancipation*, however, as a pure expression of liberated artistic will. He spent a year recording the album—the longest he ever spent on a project. "This is my most important record," he told executives from EMI, the label he contracted to handle promotion and distribution. "I'm free, and my music is free."[7]

The problem with *Emancipation* itself is simply that it's not *that* good. The triple album contains some decent songs: the luxuriously lazy "Jam of the Year," the slow-build-to-searing "The Love We Make," and the crisp marriage hymn "The Holy River." But much of the album sounds rote, redundant. Prince does formulaic R&B: "Right Back Here in My Arms" and "Somebody's Somebody." Formulaic techno-pop: "Slave," "New World," and "Human Body." Formulaic hip-hop: "Mr. Happy" and "Da, Da, Da." All in all, the album sounds less ahead of its time (the accolade so frequently bestowed on Prince's past offerings), and more like a weak imitation of R. Kelly and Dr. Dre. Prince's choice of an unremarkable cover of the Stylistics' "Betcha By Golly Wow!" for the album's first single did not bode well for the other thirty-five tracks on Emancipation, not one of which would top Prince's last big chart success, 1994's "The Most Beautiful Girl in the World"

To be sure, *Emancipation* is not Prince's worst: that was to come in the early 2000s when he began releasing music through the online NPG Music Club and, in physical form, on CD singles sold at concerts. With some exceptions—like "When Eye Lay My Hands on U" and "U Make My Sun Shine"—the songs later collected on *The Slaughterhouse* (2004) and *The Chocolate Invasion* (2004) sound like *Emancipation* B-sides. In 1996, *Emancipation* foretold not so much the bright and bounteous dawn of awesome new music as the extreme variance in the quality of releases to come: the middling (1999's *Rave Un2 the Joy Fantastic*, 2001's *Rainbow Children*, 2002's *One Nite Alone*, 2004's *Musicology*, 2006's *3121*, 2014's *Art Official Age*, 2015's *HITnRUN Phase Two*) and the mostly bad (1998's *Newpower Soul*, 2003's *Xpectation, C-Note*, and *N-E-W-S*, 2009's *LOtUSFLOW3R* and *MPLSoUND*, 2010's *20Ten*, and 2014's *HITnRUN Phase One* and *PLECTRUMELECTRUM*).

I would be remiss in not pointing out that *Emancipation* has its defenders, including Robert Christgau, who called it "the book for the young turks of a reborn, historically hip R&B."[8] He awarded it, like *Chaos and Disorder*, an A–. Reviewing the album for *The Onion's* A.V. Club, Stephen Thompson declared "there are a hell of a lot of fates worse than having [Prince] crank out albums this good every three months—and the oft-excellent *Emancipation* is a whole lot better than the oft-mediocre Prince product that's flooded the market in the past few years."[9] Revisiting the album for *Billboard* in 2016, Dan Weiss argues: "The music on *Emancipation* is uniformly strong and varied, possibly Prince's most consistently good album of the 1990s."[10] (I would bestow that compliment on *The Gold Experience*, if not on 1992's *Love Symbol*.) Twenty years later, I find that *Emancipation* still makes a fine album for spring cleaning. It is upbeat, happy, and, yes, "free"—eclectic and jazzy. The propulsive anger of *Come* (1994), *The Gold Experience*, and *Chaos and Disorder* has vanished. A sense of relief and release infuses the whole effort. But forced to put something together fast to liberate himself from contractual oppression, Prince made a better album with *Chaos and Disorder*. As musically varied as it is sprawling, as uniformly strong as it is undistinguished, *Emancipation* ultimately comes off as both unchallenging and overworked.

Emancipation suggests, at least in hindsight, that Warner Brothers had been right. Prince wanted to release too much. He needed to edit himself—to slow down and hold back. However emancipatory, the ability to release whatever he wanted whenever he wanted didn't do the overall quality of Prince's work any favors. Of course, it's hard to underestimate today Prince's influence on modern methods of music distribution. Prior to the advent of Napster and streaming services, and the cratering of the compact disc market, Prince was uniquely poised to step off a major label and still make money. There are reasons other than his prescient changes in music distribution models, however, for Prince critics to so often divide his career into pre- and post-1995. The distinction registers the difference between a lot and too much, almost consistently brilliant and often dull. At his regular rate of production, Prince conceivably wrote or recorded over a hundred songs for *Emancipation*. And the thirty-six songs that survived number around twenty-four too many. *Emancipation* would have been better as a single album. "Jam of the Year" remains the lead track. "Curious Child" and "Emancipation" make the cut. I'm even partial to "Face Down," a Prince rap about the audacity of hearing "no" from the music industry. But "Damned If Eye Do" and "Style" become B-sides. "White Mansion" and "My Computer" never leave the vault.

For a triple album by Prince, *Emancipation* faired just okay, rising to number eleven on the *Billboard* 200. To date, it has sold north of one million copies.[11] For Prince's supposedly most important album, however, *Emancipation*'s sales landed far below *Purple Rain*'s twenty-one million or even *Sign o' the Times*' four million. One must always be cautious of judging quality in terms of sales, but, in Prince's case, the comparison is fair—a more or less accurate reflection of the changing cultural importance of Prince's music. *Emancipation* is today something of a lost Prince album. It's not an album anyone would use to introduce Prince's work. It lacks a track as memorable as later songs like "Musicology" (2004) or "Black Sweat" (2006). None of its songs appear on iTunes' list of the Essential Prince. *Emancipation* seems, in hindsight, like an album Prince needed to make in the moment but almost immediately move on from.

In this case, Prince moved on to the January 1998 release of *Crystal Ball*, another three albums of material from the vault, along with the acoustic album *The Truth* and the orchestral-ballet album *Kamasutra*. Again, there are gems in this five-disc bundle: the psychedelic "Crystal Ball," recorded alongside *Sign*'s "Starfish and Coffee" in 1986 and slotted for two ultimately abandoned albums *Dream Factory* and an unrelated triple-disc *Crystal Ball*; the insane "Cloreen Bacon Skin," a studio jam with Morris Day on drums and Prince on bass and vocals; and a thumping live version of "Days of Wild" (the studio version of which remains unreleased), in which Prince leads the audience in a chant of "free the slave." *The Truth*'s title track, "Don't Play Me," and "The Other Side of the Pillow" mark the best of Prince on acoustic guitar. But again, too, the package contains headscratchers. "Poom Poom" has to be one of Prince's least inspired terms for sex. *Kamasutra* bores. And what the hell is "Animal Kingdom?" An acoustic song espousing veganism, complete with dolphin chattering and an admonition to "leave your brothers and sisters in the sea." On Prince.org message boards, "Animal Kingdom" routinely ranks, along with *Emancipation*'s "Mr. Happy" and his 2010 song for the Minnesota Vikings "Purple and Gold," among Prince's worst.

If *Crystal Ball* and *The Truth* contain some of the best and worst of Prince, they, along with *Chaos and Disorder* and *Emancipation*, prove the artistic and career utility of a distinction Prince was arguably trying to escape in his feud with Warner Brothers: the distinction between an A-side and a B-side. Prince had released an album of B-sides before: the third disc on his 1993 *The Hits/The B-Sides* collection. Here, too, is some of the best of Prince: "Gotta Stop (Messin' Around)," "How Come U Don't Call Me Anymore," "Erotic City," "She's Always in My Hair," and "17 Days." But these B-sides are, for the most part, great, enduring tracks that hadn't found their own album. The slash between a hit and a B-side wears thin on that three-disc compilation. The same cannot be said of the album *and* non-album tracks released in and after 1996. The chart-toppers had vanished. And notwithstanding some minor flashes of his previous popularity in the two decades that followed (his ostensible "comeback" with 2004's *Musicology* and his twenty-one-night stand at London's O2 arena in 2007), the hits wouldn't return with the same frequency or force. Taken as a whole, Prince's post-1995 catalog provides the B-side to pre-1995's A-side.

***

Why, then, do I love *Emancipation*? Probably because I discovered Prince in the 1990s during my late adolescence, when music makes its most indelible impression. When music tangles itself up in the synapsis of emerging adult identity. When, as Gina Arnold writes in her chapter in this volume on R.E.M.'s EP *Chronic Town*, music leaves you feeling like you've been punched in the face.

The Prince who punched my acne-ridden teenage face was not the Prince of *1999* or *Purple Rain*, albums released when I was 3 and 4 years old, respectively. The first song of Prince's I remember hearing, or at least identifying as a song by that tiny black guy in high heels, was the aforementioned ballad "The Most Beautiful Girl in the World." On a loop with Elton John's "Blessed" and Hootie and the Blowfish's "Let Her Cry," the song played every couple of hours during my part-time shifts at Media Play, a long-defunct big-box retailer of music, books, and movies. The lyrics to "The Most Beautiful Girl in the World" sounded like the stuff of ordinary pop: "It's plain to see you're the reason that God made a girl." It could have been a line from the New Kids on the Block, whom I'd had the good social sense to stop liking several years prior. But this pop song was sexy, experienced, and sultry in a way the New Kids never were. I wanted to know what Prince knew about sex, about God.

To own "The Most Beautiful Girl in the World," I purchased 1995's *The Gold Experience*, as well as the 1994 EP *The Beautiful Experience*, which features the single and six remixes. (I was, and remain, a completist.) With the exception of bubblegum pop, most of the music I listened to as a young teenager fell into the genre of contemporary Christian music (CCM): dc Talk, for instance, about whom I wrote my 33 1/3 book in collaboration with my co-editor for this volume, D. Gilson. But I also listened to a lot of Michael W. Smith and Amy Grant. Some Twila Paris and too much Carmen. The minor-key grizzliness of so much grunge and alternative music scared me. The crime-, sex-, and bullet-ridden world portrayed in so much rap and hip-hop music remained entirely foreign to my rich suburban white boy experience. I had moral problems with the whole of the secular music industry and its championing of "worldly values," so even as I edged into the early-1990s mainstream, I remained safely on the adult contemporary margins with Sting, Rod Stewart, Bryan Adams, Elton John, and Billy Joel. In 1995, I had simply never heard anything as sexually aggressive as *The Gold Experience*'s "Eye Hate U": a mean slow burn built around the mock trial of a cheating girlfriend. Prince asks the court "to have the defendant place her hands behind her back / So [he] can tie her up tight and get into the act"—a form of sex I would later learn to call hate fucking. I had never envisioned the equation of female financial and sexual power espoused on "P Control." I did not know that music could be as throbbingly seductive as "Shhh" ("I wanna do you after school like some homework. / Am I getting you hot?") Or as gloriously wild as "Billy Jack Bitch," which culminates in a horn solo the likes of which I previously supposed the instrument incapable.

The literature on Prince swells with stories of discovering Prince: the punch, the moment of revelation, when the listener encounters a strange new world of sex and spirituality, of libidinous apocalypticism and virtuoso musicality.[12] My story is no different, however late my port of entry. I knew music, especially black music, could be dirty. I'd heard that 2 Live Crew produced an album so dirty it was illegal. My parents forbade me from buying Vanilla Ice's *To the Extreme* (1990). But Prince was too good to turn into my parents or the police. As a closeted gay Christian teen, I found Prince's music tantalizing and cathartic, brimming with jizz and Jesus alike. If he "sincerely want[ed] to fuck the taste out of your mouth" (*1999*'s "Let's Pretend We're Married"), he also wanted Delores to "introduce the carpet to something other than [her] knees" ("Dinner with Delores"). There wasn't much Christian goodness I could wrench from "Horny Toad" (the jump-blues B-side to "Little Red Corvette") or the incest-endorsing "Sister" (off 1980's *Dirty Mind*). But there was godliness aplenty in much of 1988's *Lovesexy*. "The Cross" (from *Sign*) was straight-up CCM, right? And the point of "Dinner with Delores" was clearly that Dolores *shouldn't* be whoring around.[13] When Prince sang, on "Chaos and Disorder," that if he "had fifteen women, he would only fuck with one," I nodded in approval of his inclination to monogamy.

Although I didn't predict Prince's conversion to the Jehovah's Witnesses (I hoped more for non-denominational Christian), *Emancipation* slotted easily into my narrative of Prince's awakening to Jesus. Compared to previous albums, Prince had cleaned up his lyrics. He sings about sex, of course, but less so, and he's not vulgar. The sex on *Emancipation* is mostly marital, chaste. He built "Sex in the Summer" around the sound of his unborn son's heartbeat. He invites his new wife to the bedroom for the purpose of procreation ("Let's Have a Baby"). He admonishes men to satisfy their wives (okay, their "babies") to keep them from straying ("Sleep Around"). "The Holy River" celebrates marriage as a spiritual and sexual transformation: "Relationships based on the physical are over and done / You'd rather have fun with only one." "Joint 2 Joint" strays slightly from the straight and narrow in its story of a one-night stand with a woman who thinks she's Prince's "soulmate," but we all make mistakes. I ultimately classified the song, along with the Song-of-Solomon-tinged "Soul Sanctuary" and the cover of Joan Osborne's "One of Us," as one of *Emancipation*'s songs about spiritual searching—for truth, for God.

I love *Emancipation* because I hear in it my adolescent sprawl—its poise as a moment of transition to something new. (For me, that would actually be to an out gay atheist, albeit several tumultuous years later.) I recognize now that the earlier albums, the albums of the 1980s, are better, more culturally enduring albums. But that recognition would only come with time, age, and musical exposure. Because, in 1996, my musical exposure was (severely) limited, Prince's catalog offered me a course in music history and genres: rock, pop, funk, dance, jazz, hip-hop, rap, even gospel. I followed along not only because *Emancipation* resonated with my Christian teen confusions about sex and spirituality, but also because it was sonically familiar *enough*. Much of *Emancipation* echoed the sounds I knew from their Christian music translators like dc Talk, and from popular Atlanta radio stations like Star 94: contemporary R&B and (radio-friendly) hip-hop. It took me a long time to understand how innovative, how pattern-setting, albums like *1999, Purple Rain*, and *Sign o' the Times* had been. How Prince fused rock guitar riffs with funk bass lines. How he at once embodied glam, punk, and soul sensibilities, male and female personas, and queerly exploded the notion of what it meant to be a "black artist." How everything that's great on *Emancipation* sounds like Prince imitating himself a decade previously. I had to listen. I had to be told.

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My Prince collection now spans from 1978's *For You* CD to the 2018 vinyl release *Piano & a Microphone*, a collection of solo recordings from 1983. My husband finds this collection excessive; it's redundant now that almost all of Prince's music is available on streaming services. It's mere memorabilia. But I retain the hipster preference for anachronistic physical product. The collection also includes the unstreamable: for instance, *NYC Live 1/11/97*, a cassette single issued by NPG Records exclusively through the phone-order line 1–800-NEW-FUNK. This "cassingle" makes a distinction between its "Funky Side" and its "Funkier Side." But this distinction proves meaningless. The same live versions of two songs—"Jam of the Year" and "Face Down"—appear on both sides. When I bought the tape, I found this "joke" puzzling. I owned plenty of cassingles and CD singles, all of which I bought for their B-sides. I carried Elton John's "The One" to the checkout counter at Turtle's Records and Tapes because I wanted to hear "Suit of Wolves" and "Fat Boys and Ugly Girls." Sting's "Fields of Gold" single included excellent live versions of "King of Pain," "Fragile," and Jimi Hendrix's "Purple Haze" (all from the 1991 *Soul Cages* concert video). I have inexplicably strong memories of roller skating in my neighbor's carport to the instrumental version of Michael Jackson's "Black or White." The B-side was supposed to supply something extra, something not already on the album. Like the new songs tacked onto a compilation album, the B-side gave people who already owned the album a reason to buy the song again.

But to this demand—from labels, from consumers—Prince had also started saying no. Two other album tracks appeared on the single to "Dinner with Delores": "Right the Wrong" and "Had U." "Right Back Here in My Arms" appeared as the B-side to "Betcha By Golly Wow!" "The Holy River" appeared side-by-side with the radio edit of "Somebody's Somebody" (along with two remixes of the latter song and an already released remix of "The Most Beautiful Girl in the World"). Following the release of 1993's *The Hits/The B-Sides*, one could no longer expect to find a "17 Days" or "How Come U Don't Call Me Anymore" on the flip side of a new Prince cassingle or as track two on a thin-cased CD. Other album tracks and remixes padded these products out. Prince, we know, was now vaulting more music: holding onto it for another album, if not in perpetuity or "4 private use." The bonus tracks included on the 2017 re-release of *Purple Rain* confirm that he was capable of vaulting some of his strongest material: "The Dance Electric" (a song Prince gave to André Cymone) and "Electric Intercourse." Yet Prince's disinterest in releasing "proper" B-sides after 1993 proved prescient. In courting the disappearance of A-sides and B-sides, Prince was, as was so often the case previously, once again ahead of his time.

Since the invention of the vinyl record in 1948, the term "B-side" has referred, most literally, to the second side of the disc. On LPs, the B-side equates with the second side of the album—sometimes the place for filler, but not always, and less so as the idea of the album developed throughout the second half of the twentieth century. On singles issued to record stores, the B-side became a place to showcase non-album tracks, demos, and live recordings. The A-side featured the song the label wanted promoted to radio and consumers. The B-side housed something else, something presumably worth hearing, but also something generally considered lesser, and thus accorded secondary status. B-sides played to a fan's obsession: to our desire, as music listeners and completists, for something *more* that usually can't be satisfied.

This A/B distinction between album and non-album track, good and less-good, did not always hold. Plenty of singles featured only radio and album edits, remixes, and other album tracks. Some B-sides, like Elvis Presley's cover of "Hound Dog" (1956), The Rolling Stones' "You Can't Always Get What You Want" (1969), Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive" (1978), and The Smiths' "How Soon is Now" (1984), surpassed their A-sides in popularity. But ideally the consumer received something that hadn't made the album cut. If you wanted a sample of all the other material Prince recorded around *Purple Rain*, you had to buy the singles. If, in 1987, you wanted to hear the songs that didn't appear on U2's *The Joshua Tree* ("Luminous Times [Hold on to Love]" or "Spanish Eyes"), you had to purchase the singles (for "With or Without You" and "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For," respectively). If you wanted to debate whether "Even in His Youth" should have been on Nirvana's *Nevermind*, you had to hear it on the single for "Smells Like Teen Spirit."

The decline of the cassette, and more recently the CD, has resulted in the diminished use of the term "B-side." Now merely figurative in the age of streaming music, the "B-side" sounds somewhat out of time. The album form, which *Emancipation* expanded to the point of explosion, has arguably outlived itself. The ease with which we sequence our digital playlists provides us as fans and consumers, rather than just the artist or the label, with the ability to privilege and subordinate tracks, to track our own "essentials" and "extras." For many of the writers in this collection, a B-side designates an extra. It means additional, leftover, supplemental, or excessive. Sometimes more is better. Sometimes not. Sometimes the B-side helps to illuminate the logic of the A-side—its sequencing, cohesiveness, and unity. Sometimes it outshines the A-side. Either way, B-sides help to flesh out our understanding of an album, an artist, a group, a genre, or a moment in time by asking us to focus on what gets relegated to the margins.

The 33 1/3 series focuses on albums, not songs, so perhaps titling this collection *33 1/3: The B-Sides* is misleading. Here, too, the focus lies on albums, although often on particular songs from those often-overlooked albums. We invited previous 33 1/3 authors to write short chapters on albums they chose not to write about originally: the ones that didn't make the cut. We asked, too, that these albums fall generally into the category of the forgotten or the neglected, whether justly or unjustly. Or if the album was popular (like Leonard Cohen's *Songs of Love and Hate* [1971]), or a breakthrough (like Sinéad O'Connor's *I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got* [1990], famous for its cover of Prince's "Nothing Compares 2 U"), what case remained for considering it a B-side? What about these albums consigns them to the outskirts of an artist's catalog or a historical moment? To the second side of a career or a cultural narrative? And what about the album endures: culturally, personally, sonically? Why write about it?

My lack of knowledge regarding Prince's previous catalog made *Emancipation* an important Prince album to me—one I took on face value as Prince's most important album. I effectively shoehorned it into the genre of CCM even as it anchored a catalog that helped me come to terms with my own queerness. In time, I realized that *Emancipation* was a B-side. I came to that realization sometime around 2000, perhaps the 170th time I heard *Sign o' the Times*. Prince seemed to realize it much more quickly, perhaps on the "Jam of the Year" tour (1997–1998). I saw all three shows Prince performed at the Fox Theatre in Atlanta (January 8–10, 1998). I wanted to hear "Face Down," sure, but the audience screamed for the hits that packed the set: "If I Was Your Girlfriend" or "Kiss" or "Purple Rain."

Prince would frequently chafe against the expectation that he tour with the hits and the hits alone. He said repeatedly, as the 1990s ended, that he would no longer perform "1999" in the new millennium. Then he performed it, a lot. On tour for *The Rainbow Children*, Prince stuck mostly to that album, captured on 2002's *One Night Alone … Live!* box set. Then he followed it up in 2003 with a world tour of hits. It's as if Prince realized, by the mid-2000s, that his new albums were indeed the B-sides to the more enduring A-sides of his 1980s' catalog. Fans bought tickets to hear "Let's Go Crazy." If you played that, they might stick around for "Guitar" (from 2007's *Planet Earth*).

Prince's final two shows, also at the Fox Theater in Atlanta on April 16, 2016, themselves suggest an A/B distinction. Unfortunately, I did not attend either show. I live two hours away from Atlanta, and I was busy with work. The first show of the night was thick with crowd favorites: “Little Red Corvette,” “Dirty Mind,” “Baby I’m a Star,” “Pop Life,” “Kiss,” and “Adore.” It was only somewhat self-indulgent. Alone at the piano for this tour, Prince played “Linus and Lucy,” his cover of Joni Mitchell’s “A Case of You,” *The Rainbow Children*’s “Muse 2 the Pharaoh,” and even “Chopsticks.” But Prince truly brought the strangeness in the second show of the night, what would prove to be his last live concert. He opened with The Staple Singers’ “When Will We Be Paid,” the *Love Symbol* deep-cut “The Max,” “Black Sweat” (from 2006’s *3121*), and “Girl” (a B-side to 1985’s “America” [United States] and “Pop Life” [United Kingdom]). He played “Indifference,” a song he’d recently written with 3RDEYEGIRL and released only as a live version online, and covered Bob Marley and the Wailers’ “Waiting in Vain.” He closed the night with a medley of “Purple Rain,” “The Beautiful Ones,” and “Diamonds and Pearls”—medleys having long been his preferred method of running through so many of the A-sides his audience demanded. “I got so many hits,” he used to tell the crowd, “y’all can’t handle me.” But the April 16 shows, in their structure, suggest his heart was just as much in the B-sides. I should have been there.

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REINTRODUCTION: TRIVIAL, DERIVATIVE, TENACIOUS—CHRISTINA AGUILERA'S *MI REFLEJO* (2000)

D. Gilson

> "I want to be an all-around entertainer. I want to act, make films, make albums, do whatever I can."
>
> —Christina Aguilera

Between August 24, 1999, and October 26, 2002, Christina "The Voice" Aguilera released four studio albums: her self-titled debut (1999), *Mi Reflejo* (September 2000), *My Kind of Christmas* (October 2000), and *Stripped* (2002). Over this mere three-year, two-month, and two-day span, she sold over twenty-eight million of these albums; transformed her image from Disney child star to assless-chaps-wearing, sex-positive young feminist; and, it seems clear to me now, altered the state of the B-side from an undervalued album or song to an artistic identity in and of itself. Christina Aguilera is, herself, a B-side. And I love her for that.

Just as the MP3 digitized music—taking the art form from a physical enterprise to a series of ones and zeroes, likes and retweets—the B-side as a concept faced a peculiar conundrum in its cultural rotation. Initially a thing of necessity during the mid-twentieth century—the literal backside of a vinyl pressing—the B-side became a way for artists to include likely trivial tracks on otherwise sellable enterprises at the bequest of their record labels. As vinyl records became cassettes and then compact discs, the B-side didn't disappear, but became a powerful marketing tool to drive up overall sales. I didn't *need* to buy Amy Grant's 1991 single "Baby, Baby," as the song was her chart-topper off *Heart in Motion*. But I begged my sister Jennifer to buy the cassingle for me anyway, because on its B-side was "Lead Me On." With lyrics like "Bitter cold terrain / Echoes of a slamming door / In chambers made for sleeping, forever," the song *might* allude to slavery and the Holocaust—or so Grant told *CCM*, a magazine for contemporary Christian music that Jennifer and I read every month perched on her bed in our plain ranch house back in Aurora, Missouri. A budding poet, I found the metaphors she wrote (with Wayne Kirkpatrick and Michael W. Smith) intoxicating and "deep," but, had I looked back, I would have also realized the song appeared on her 1988 album. The "Baby, Baby" single was just an excuse for A&M to resell two songs they'd already been selling.

In his preceding introduction, Will points to songs like Prince's "17 Days" and "How Come U Don't Call Me Anymore" as superior B-sides in a pre-digital moment: non-album tracks, outtakes, exclusives, something extra. To this list I would add Madonna's "Act of Contrition," a B-side to 1989's "Like a Prayer," driven by Prince on guitar; and

Elliott Smith's "How to Take a Fall" (1998), a song with an unintentional manifesto on the B-side: "Make me a present and make it something sweet / Small enough to go unnoticed and big enough to compete."

The world, and certainly the world of popular music, turns on one's ability to be "big enough to compete." In the twenty-first century, many artists became lifestyle brands in order to secure their market share. "You a mom-and-pop, I'm a corporation," sang Mariah Carey on 2009's "Obsessed," a song supposedly dissing the hardly small-time rapper Eminem. Consequently, album B-sides became less about promoting singles, and more about artists promoting themselves to a hopefully expanding consumer base. This transformation, as well as this expansive concept of a B-side, had pre-digital precedence, of course. See the films of Elvis Presley, if not of Prince and Madonna, too. Music accompanied motion pictures to not only feed the appetites of music fans, but also to find new receptive listeners. (After seeing Madonna in *Evita* [1996] at the Wehrenberg 16 Theater in Springfield, Missouri, my 12-year-old queer self demanded my mother take me to our local FYE to buy the soundtrack. Years of me belting "Don't Cry for Me Argentina" alongside Madge from my bedroom subsequently ensued.) But, in the digital age, B-sides largely became something more tangible: pieces of memorabilia, perfumes, reality shows, tennis shoes, hair extensions, jeans, and Spanish-language translations.

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Here is one of the many ways in which I am an American stereotype. Though I have spent weeks in Mexico, Argentina, Venezuela, and Nicaragua, and though I now live in Texas, I know only three Spanish phrases:

1. *Mi mariconcito* (My little faggot)
2. *Gloria a Dios* (Glory to God)
3. *Ven comingo* (Come on over [a mistranslation]).

The first is a more recent acquisition, from a friend taking Spanish lessons and taken to calling me *mi mariconcito* as a term of endearment. But the other two are distinct remnants, or ever-lingering spirits, from my evangelical childhood and, more specifically, holdovers from the missions trips I took as a Jesus-lovin' teenager. Listening to Christina Aguilera today, and to her perhaps laughable 2000 Spanish-language album *Mi Reflejo* in particular, inevitably transports me back to one of these missions trips: when I traveled with my youth group (Real Life Student Ministries of James River Assembly of God) to Venezuela in the summer of 2001.

Taylor, Aurora, and I occupy the back row of a Boeing 737 bound for Caracas from Miami, where we have flown via Dallas from Springfield. From our sleepy corner of Missouri to a Venezuela in upheaval, to a sprawling capital where Leftist revolutionary Hugo Rafael Chávez Frias has come to power just months before. We are newly 16, and will spend the week with local Pentecostal missionaries, devoting mornings to prayer in our suites at the Caracas Hilton; afternoons to volunteering in local orphanages or handing out tracts in plazas between towering, mirrored skyscrapers; and evenings to theatrical church services on the streets, performing skits in broken Spanish and giving testimonies through interpreters. *Gloria a Dios, Gloria a Dios*, we'll whisper to each other, and to God. Ours is a story typical of evangelical Christian culture at the beginning of the twenty-first century: we are white suburban teenagers here to save the brown urban Catholics.

Preparing for this trip back in the States, I have been consigned to minor roles in our skits because, it is quickly apparent, I have no tongue for Spanish. I spend two weeks perfecting the phrase *Gloria a Dios!* only to be relegated to a silent part in a skit which Taylor and I can't discern as comedic or tragic: I am just your everyday jock at an ordinary high-school party, bro'. As loud rock 'n' roll music fills our youth group auditorium—a stand-in for what will become a busy street corner in downtown Caracas—I pantomime shooting up heroin in my fleshy, white arm and eventually languish in the unseen fires of Hell.

I do not care. Taylor, Aurora, and I are silently realizing we're queer. Daily revelations are soundtracked by Whitney Houston, Selena, Matchbox 20, Michael Jackson, Britney Spears, The Goo Goo Dolls, Mariah Carey, Third Eye Blind, Madonna, and, of course, Christina Aguilera. On our first trip to South America, to a city more sprawling and more cosmopolitan than any we've ever visited, we skip out on prayer sessions and afternoon street canvasing to drink *café au laits* at coffee stands outside Best Buy or Macy's or Saks Fifth Avenue. (Chavez's government has yet to tank the then-flourishing Venezuelan economy.) In the world of our youth group, we three queers are relegated to the sidelines, so nobody notices us skipping out on prayer or witnessing. We are liked, but never the stars of the show that is evangelical Christianity in a youth-obsessed mega church at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Never the lead in a skit, never the solo in a performance, never the young person chosen to deliver a testimony or lead the group in prayer. In the world of our youth group, we're B-sides: superfluous, tangential, extra.

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"I'm on a lonely road that leads to nowhere," Christina Aguilera crooned on Ed McMahon's Nielsen-topping *Star Search* on March 15, 1990. At just nine years old, it was instantly evident Aguilera could sing, belting out the jazz standard "A Sunday Kind of Love," a song that had last been made famous by Etta James on her 1960 album *At Last!* Watching Aguilera's performance on YouTube today, I'm struck by its novelty. She's belting impeccably, of course, a skill we've come to expect of her. But she's so young on that stage, and the song feels inappropriate for someone who has yet to turn ten. Not inappropriate in the sense of the performance's morals, but in the sense that Aguilera lacks a certain conviction. "Oh I'm hoping to discover," she pleads to the audience, riffing from a soft minor chord up to a vibrating major note she sustains in what will become her signature style, "a certain kind of lover who will show me the way." But her body, it's just too small to contain the gravitas, the lived experience, the song demands, rendering her performance a novelty, a schtick, and derivative.

But it doesn't matter, not really. Aguilera became a finalist that night in 1990, but she didn't win. She lost to a young African American named Christopher Eason. (He posts on social media sporadically now under the handle @TheKidWhoBeatChristina and is, last I can find, a barista in Oklahoma.) Eason, age twelve, dazzled in his interpretation of Patti LaBelle's 1986 song "There's a Winner in You." He appears completely comfortable in his young body, and it shows as he smiles at the audience: "There's a winner, there's a hero, there's a lover, too. Somewhere, there's a winner in you." For not the last time in her life, Aguilera was overshadowed. She was a living B-side.

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This (in hindsight, lackluster) performance at age nine perhaps foretold a struggle Aguilera would face her entire career, a struggle to feel "at home" in that voice that so defined, and perhaps even defied her—or at least defied the body in which an overt sexuality, or plea to sexuality, would often feel more like a desperate commercial attempt as opposed to a "natural" expression, if such a thing is ever possible. And much of this desperation would come across as Christina being a reactionary to her supposed rival, Britney Spears. I don't want to dwell on this period, or to pit the two stars against each other, a strange (and gendered) pitting we, the listening and viewing public, have long insisted upon. But it is important to a discussion of Aguilera herself as a B-side. Whereas Britney started off as a mid-riff-bearing Catholic schoolgirl, a sexual spectacle and archetype if ever there was one, with her 1999 *Billboard*-topping single "… Baby One More Time," Christina offered herself (or RCA offered her, depending on whose account you believe) as a flirty but family-friendly alternative with "Genie in a Bottle," and then her self-titled debut as well as the hasty follow-up commercial albums *Mi Reflejo* and *My Kind of Christmas*. I mean, a Christmas album! This was more in the trajectory of Amy Grant, queen of the holiday compilation, than Madonna or Cher.

Thus, it was shocking, to say the least, when Aguilera largely disappeared for two years and returned with 2002's *Stripped*. I still remember the afternoon of October 4, 2002, when I plopped on the couch after school and watched MTV's *TRL* (*Total Request Live*) as my mother bent over her sewing machine nearby. Although Aguilera's handlers wanted to release the ballad "Beautiful" as the lead single from *Stripped*, Christina insisted on "Dirrty"—yes, with two "r"s!—as an assertion of her sexual liberation. A collaboration with hip-hop's Redman, the video opens with a tight shot of a woman's butt. Barely encased in tiny red panties with a black "X" below assless leather chaps stitched with "Xtina," Christina walks forward and her cheeks bounce free. The shot widens and we find her, hair filthy and face bearing several new piercings, in a dark, wet, Thai warehouse. She eventually finds herself in a boxing ring, fighting or dancing or *something* with a group of similarly-dressed women. She half-sings, half-spits lines like "you can just put your butt to the maximum." And I don't want to slut-shame Christina, but none of it feels like *her*. It feels forced. Like a plea, not for sex—I'm totally fine with that—but for attention, i.e., for sales. It certainly didn't help that Christina can't dance or act, and the song hides what she can do, which is flat-out sing. As the video played that afternoon, my mother stopped sewing and looked up at the television. "Huh," she sighed, "When I was young we had to pay a nickel to see that."

But again, Christina was too late, a reactionary in a marketplace that largely rewards early adapters. Prince had made the assless pants famous as far back as 1991, when he appeared on the MTV Video Music Awards to perform the also double-consonanted "Gett Off." Only months prior, Britney Spears had released *Britney*. Its lead single, "I'm a Slave 4 U" (here again, Prince script), featured Spears in her own bikini top, sweating in a Latin American club as dancers—male and female alike—lick the sweat off her body. The song and video are iconic, positioning Spears as the heiress apparent to Madonna's and Prince's kingdoms of sex in public. And watching it today, it feels sexy as fuck, still, and, unlike Christina's "Dirrty," somehow unforced, organic, and natural. Watching it renders Aguilera imitative, juvenile, a B-side.

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It is a muggy afternoon in Caracas when we should be at an underground train station, smiling wide on the platform and inviting people to street church that evening. (From my experience, commuters don't want to be bothered by teenagers trying to proselytize. We stood in that metro station, as Ezra Pound writes, smiling dumbly at the "apparition of these faces in the crowd" rushing to pass us and board their train.) But Aurora and I don't stay underground long. We sneak off to the Museo de Arte Contemporanéo, where we stand before a giant print of Andres Serrano's 1987 photograph "Piss Christ," the rough crucifix floating in a glass jar of the artist's own urine. Aurora and I wear matching green T-shirts bearing *James River Assembly Missions 2000* on the front, *Gloria a Dios!* in huge, tacky, white font across our backs. "It's beautiful," she says of the portrait, and I nod my head.

Technically, *Gloria a Dios!* was the second Spanish phrase I mastered. That summer, Taylor and I drove around the Ozarks every day in my gold Saturn sedan. We drove to the mall or to get cashew chicken at Hong Kong Inn or to Barnes & Noble, where we sat for hours in the *café* with a stack of magazines, each reading *Out* or *XY* or *The Advocate* behind a screen of *The New Yorker* or *U.S. News & World Report* or *ESPN*. Taylor was taking Spanish lessons and I was taking a class in HTML coding at the local community college, and every day as we drove around town we listened to Christina Aguilera's second studio album, *Mi Reflejo* (2000), on repeat. The album, which somehow won the Best Female Pop Vocal Album at the 2001 Latin Grammy Awards, is mostly known for its Spanish translations of Aguilera's self-titled, *Billboard*-topping 1999 debut. Track five, "Ven Conmigo (Solamente Tú)" ("Come On Over Baby [All I Want Is You]"), was by far our favorite and, in the Ozarks humidity—my AC had broken that summer—we'd drive from wherever to church to practice for our upcoming missions trip, the windows down and our 16-year-old queer tenors belting, *Ven conmigo, ven conmigo baby, ven conmigo, ven conmigo baby*, out of the open windows as Christina, herself not fluent, struggled on the stereo.

Like me, and despite the suggestion of the surname Aguilera, Christina did not speak Spanish before (during, or after) recording a Spanish-language album. This did not daunt her producer, Cuban-American Rudy Pérez, who was used to working with artists seeking reverse crossover into the Spanish-language market from mainstream

(English-centric) American pop: itself a type of missions work in the name of capitalism, if not Christ. Before Christina, he brought Mexican-American Christian pop star Jaci Velasquez to the top of the *Billboard* Hot Latin Tracks with the single "Llegar a Tí" ("Get to You"), the first Christian song to reach that status; but, unlike Christina, Velasquez grew up speaking Spanish along the US-Mexico border in south Texas. When it came to preparing Christina for the studio, *Billboard* reports: "Pérez wrote out all of Aguilera's lyrics phonetically and devised a system to help her roll her 'r's."[1] On the track "Falsas Esperanzas" ("False Expectations"), Christina avoids the rolling "r" of the repeating *corazón* by trilling in her signature vibrato. This is true not only of "Falsas Esperanzas," but also of *Mi Reflejo* as a whole, a technique of avoidance that leaves the album feeling chaotic, other-worldly, but from a world to which few want to travel. In the arc of her career, the album is a B-side, but a telling one: it doesn't matter that her Spanish translation of hits like "Come On Over Baby (All I Want Is You)" ("Ven Conmigo (Solamente Tú)"), "Genie in a Bottle" ("Genio Atrapado"), "I Turn to You" ("Por Siempre Tú"), and "What a Girl Wants" ("Una Mujer") are not, aesthetically speaking, *good*. It matters that they poised the pop starlet to expand her selling power with minimal effort on her part or the part of producers and her record label.

In his chapter on commercialism and J-pop for this volume, Jordan Ferguson argues that the women of the group Perfume, whom he loves, "aren't artists per se, they're sales people. Every Perfume single is tied to a fizzy drink or an automobile or a line of supplements, because in Japan 'selling out' isn't something to be avoided, it's necessary for survival." I want to extend his thesis *avant la letre*: in any crowded marketplace, "selling out" is necessary for survival. And if ever there was a crowded marketplace in contemporary American pop, it was the group of young white women vying for bubblegum royalties in the late 1990s and early 2000s following Madonna's foray into electronic dance music with 1999's *Ray of Light*.

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The original title for *Mi Reflejo* was *Latin Lover Girl*, although marketing agents decided to cash in on the earlier success of Aguilera's 1998 single "Reflection," which had garnered her original record deal with RCA. Aguilera made a music video for "Reflection" to accompany the DVD release of Disney's *Mulan*, an animated "interpretation" of a legendary Chinese woman warrior who disguised herself as a man in the Northern Wei province sometime during the fifth or sixth century C.E.

Of course, race brings complexity to the B-side at every turn. In his superlative chapter herein on De La Soul's *De La Soul is Dead* (1991), Shawn Taylor explains how "black whimsy is about being playfully odd. It's about mapping your inner joy and curiosity over the mundanity of your everyday existence. It's about looking into the shadows without fear, possibly even venturing into them, just to see if anything is there." This is true, but what happens when a white girl with the surname Aguilera records in a non-native language? Is she venturing into some shadow of her past—real or imaginary—just to see if anything is there? Or is she, like the Walt Disney Company that largely created her, a white mass media colonizer?

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Following her thwarted win on *Star Search*, Christina traveled to Orlando in 1991 to audition for a reboot of Disney's 1950s' *The Mickey Mouse Club* (*MMC*). Billed as a variety show to include musical and dance performances as well as sketch comedy, *MMC* producers loved Aguilera's audition, but couldn't find a way around union rules; Christina was two years too young to be cast. An 11-year-old Christina Aguilera was sent packing back to Pittsburgh.

When she turned 13, Aguilera immediately joined *MMC* in 1993 for the show's final two seasons. Her cast-mates—including Britney Spears, Justin Timberlake, Ryan Gosling, and Keri Russell—lovingly nicknamed their kid sister Christina "The Diva" for her vocal prowess. (I say "lovingly," but in an unattributed interview I watched on YouTube, a young Spears, who would quickly become Aguilera's biggest competition in the marketplace of early-twenty-first century pop music, explained that the nickname arose from Christina's demanding and over-the-top behavior on set.) And although she had the voice to earn this moniker, the die was already cast, and Aguilera was, by necessity, in the shadow of her *MMC* co-stars, who could not only sing, but also dance and act. By the time Aguilera released her debut album, Keri Russell and Ryan Gosling were staring in their own hit television series, *Felicity* and *Breaker High*, respectively; Justin Timberlake was fronting the explosive boyband N*Sync; and Britney Spears was not only touring the world with Timberlake and the boys, but also releasing her own debut seven months before Christina, a debut that would go on to become the biggest selling album by a teenage artist ever.

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Mi Reflejo was a relative flop, selling less than three million copies worldwide (and less than half a million in the United States) during an era when Aguilera sold fourteen million of her self-titled 1999 debut and ten million of 2002's *Stripped*. Something was lost in translation, even if I can't stop listening to the lead single, "Ven Conmigo," over and over still today.

Ven conmigo translates not as "come on over baby," as Aguilera might have us, the English-language listeners of her Spanish-language album, believe. Instead, *ven conmigo* means literally "come with me." Song lyrics often change, slightly or significantly, in the process of translation. Meter, meaning, rhyme: these require adjustment from one tongue to another. Michael Jackson's 1987 single "I Just Can't Stop Loving You," to take just one example, became "Todo Mi Amor Eres Tú"—literally, "You Are All My Love"—when Jackson re-recorded it, using a similar phonetic rendering system, as a single for Latin audiences. Considering, however, the nakedly commercial marketing push behind Aguilera's endeavor here, a paranoid reading of Aguilera's "Ven Conmigo" might have us believe that this translation, a technical mistranslation, is best understood as an act of white American appropriation under late neoliberal capitalism—or an expression, at the very least, of American exceptionalism. To this end, as George Steiner explains in his book *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, "bad translations communicate too much."[2] I hazard that this paranoid reading is one almost any progressive scholar in the humanities is trained and ready to give: it's an easy argument to make when music is re-recorded in non-native, or not even second, languages for the express purpose of increasing sales. And yet, I don't believe this is the only, let alone the best, reading.

What is the very queer possibility in a (let's face it, white) American teen mistranslation of a simple Spanish phrase? And further, what is the queer possibility of two budding queers like Taylor and me belting out this mistranslation in a late-model Saturn sedan as we traverse the hills and valleys of the Missouri Ozarks? "Come on over baby" cum "Come with me." So much depends on the collective preposition *with*. Sometimes, as Philip Shaw argues here in his chapter on 1980's *The Return of the Durutti Column*, the love of a B-side is "a solitary affair." But sometimes, thank god, that solitary affair becomes a cult obsession, particularly for marginalized or niche groups, like queer teenagers in the backwoods of Missouri in love with both pop music and the seeming cosmopolitanism of "speaking" a second language.

Our listening to this odd B-side constituted a type of micro-collectivity. Odd, too, at a time when queers were (as if they are not still) so often rejected from the national collective. So much of modern socio-political life has been organized on the biblical principle of exclusive or illusive collectivity. "So," the writer of Matthew teaches us, "do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."[3] That's great, in theory. But queers—like so many other groups throughout our nation's history—have so often been refused entry to the kingdom of heaven, and to the kingdom collective of the state, that queer theory, for a moment, refused the call to come together with the outside world, urging us instead to seek out first our own pleasures. Forever and ever, amen.

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This anthology represents another type of collective: a group of distinct and diverse writers geeking out about the B-sides they love. And like the queerness I talk about above, the chapters collected here are promiscuous. Promiscuous, I mean, in a few key ways. Here we've been lucky to bring together many different types of writers, including academics, music journalists, and musicians themselves. They write promiscuously, too, across a variety of forms. Here you'll find music criticism fused with memoir, such as Walter Biggins's chapter on the Digable Planets or Jovana Babovic on the Smashing Pumpkins. Pete Astor writes an abecedarium on Bob Dylan's *Love and Theft*. Rebecca Wallwork writes a manifesto on disco transformation through the soundtrack to *Can't Stop the Music*. And Drew Daniel writes a treatise on suicidal ideation via an examination of Leonard Cohen's *Songs of Love and Hate*. Our writers come from a wide variety of backgrounds—racial, class, sexual, and gender—to discuss a wide variety of albums—from jazz and R&B, to folk and Jpop—beginning with 1961 and released as late as 2015. And even though we have asked them all to write under the signpost of the "B-side," that very term has taken here as many forms as there are writers and albums in these pages.