

'Family Bible' shows Nelson's versatility as a performer

By TOM MOORE

Willie Nelson

Family Bible

It was beginning to look like Willie Nelson was going through a creative dry spell. Nelson, who releases on the average about four or five albums a year, released the soundtrack for *Honeysuckle Rose* in early August and it wasn't until late October that he released *Family Bible*. But his new album was definitely worth the wait.

Family Bible does for white gospel music what Aretha Franklin's *Amazing Grace* did for black gospel music. Franklin with her zesty, heartfelt style brought black gospel to a wider audience, and Willie Nelson's religious album is just as accessible.

Family Bible features Willie on vocals and guitar and his sister Bobbie on piano. The arrangements are kept simple, and the songs aren't polluted by the Lawrence Welkish lobotomized sound that is characteristic of most of today's white gospel.

Family Bible is the best Willie Nelson album since the classic *Willie and Family Live* released two years ago.

Nelson always works best with traditional country material, whether it's songs about drinkin' and messin' around or songs about the good family life and religion. On such popular albums as *Stardust*, *Willie and Leon: Two for the Road*, and *Willie Sings Kristofferson*, the material was handled skillfully, but there was a little something missing. You can tell from listening to them that Nelson respects the material on these albums—he does all the songs justice—but somehow he just doesn't muster up that extra, added bit of soul that he puts into his more traditional material like "Whiskey River," "Night Life" and the songs on *Family Bible*.

tunes—"Family Bible" and "In God's Eyes" (first heard on Nelson's *Yesterday's Wine*) and "Kneel At The Feet of Jesus." The songs on *Family Bible* are accessible to religious and non-religious audiences because Nelson has wisely avoided blaring self-righteous tunes that are all too common to gospel music albums (witness Bob Dylan's last two efforts).

Interestingly, in the relatively calm and sober songs on the album, Nelson sneaks in some rather bluesy guitar riffs while his sister's piano playing often leaves the realm of the church for more honky-tonk soundings. The combination shows the soulfulness the Nelsons feel for the material on *Family Bible*.

Willie Nelson has become one of the biggest names in the country cross-over market in the past few years. His albums usually fill the brims of local record stores. But occasionally, because he's so versatile, Nelson will throw a real curve and come up with an album that the record company executives don't know how to market. This happened a couple of years ago with his album of Tin Pan Ally tunes, *Stardust*, and it has happened again with *Family Bible*. You have to look to find the album but for Nelson *Family Bible* is a must.

Tom Moore is arts editor for *The Daily Tar Heel*.

Records

Family Bible tunes are taken mainly from old-timey standard church hymns. "By The Rivers of Babylon," "Stand By Me," "There Shall Be Showers Of Blessings," "Softly And Tenderly," "Tell It To Jesus" and "Revive It Again" have a certain charm to them that latter-day gospel tunes lack. The tunes give a nice picture of the simple folk religion in America.

The hymns are complimented by some newer

More from the Specials

New album breaks with tradition

By MARK MURRELL

The Specials

More Specials

If you missed the Specials' first album, don't despair. It's not too late to jump on one of the most enjoyable bandwagons of the year with the new album *More Specials*.

This seven-man English band is a refreshing break from traditional new wave. They combine some traditional new wave themes and sounds with a Jamaican flavor that materializes a "ska music"—the calling card of many English bands such as Madness, the Selecter and the English Beat.

But the Specials prove themselves to be the best of the new British export. The Specials are a brisk fun-loving band. They have a happy sound. Life to these guys is a spree to enjoy rather than a ladder to climb.

Enjoy yourself, it's later than you think
Enjoy yourself while you're still in the pink
The years go by as quickly as you wink
Enjoy yourself, enjoy yourself, it's later than you think.

This number, dating all the way back to 1948, is the first and last song on the album and evokes that Specials feeling that even in a world of 9-to-5, social pretensions, nuclear war and ruthless ladder climbers, there can be laughter if we will only choose to laugh.

But the Specials aren't naive to world crisis, and may even go as far as to seem pessimistic in some songs.

*The Mickey Mouse bunch told the Ayatollah at his feet
You'll drink your oil you schmuck,
we'll eat our heads of wheat.*

They see the world as a place that often offers its young people dead ends, but the Specials are determined to emerge laughing.

*Working for the Rat Race
You know you're wasting your time
Working for the Rat Race
You're no friend of mine.*

More Specials shows that the Specials will not become just one more stagnant band that tries to churn out the same material album after album. The songs on

More Specials do not all have the short fast-paced driving quality that most of the numbers on their first album had, but they all feature some type of novelty.

There are still lots of good dance tunes on *More Specials* and even some good instrumentals.

"Sock It To 'Em J.B." is a song with lyrics composed totally of titles to James Bond films. This proves just how off-the-wall and entertaining this band can be.

They talk about jilted lovers, airplane crashes, VD, bombs, alcoholics and social outcasts in a way that anyone who grew up in this generation has to—with sympathy, but a certain resignation to the absurdity of it all.

To the Specials, life would be disastrous if taken seriously. We just have to realize that to an extent, it is all a big joke.

*I'm just living in a life without meaning
I walk and walk, do nothing*



*They just playing with a life without thinking
They talk and talk, say nothing
Nothing ever change, oh no, nothing ever change.*

You'd better enjoy yourself. It's later than you think. And one of the best ways to enjoy yourself is with this album.

Mark Murrell is state and national editor for *The Daily Tar Heel*.

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