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Green Land

By: [Matthew Murray](#)



We can never have too many recordings of daring new musical theater works. Anything that can jolt us from the stupor induced by cast albums of dumbed-down, overblown shows and anemic revivals is welcome -- and there is special cause for celebration when a CD as arresting as Brian Lane Green's *Waiting for the Glaciers to Melt* (LML Music) is released.

Glaciers has the lofty goal of raising and enriching the human spirit. (You won't find anything like that in *Spamalot* or *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*.) Green approaches the material with a revivalist fervor that is ideally matched by Johnny Rodgers, who provided the string arrangements, assisted Green with the

vocal arrangements, and whose band accompanies the songs. Almost every track is imbued with the sound of Southern spirituals or a feeling of isolated longing; occasionally, the two are combined to unique effect. Though religion is only rarely mentioned overtly in the 10 tracks on this disc, the devotional subtext echoes loud and clear throughout.

Each number is rife with emotion, from the laid-back, youthful reflection of "Dad and Me" and the cautious hopefulness of "I Know" to the terrifying uncertainty of the title song. These songs span the spectrum of human feelings and memories, focusing most intently on growing up and its associated fears. This disc's first number is its most powerful, almost the work's theme statement -- "Grandma's Song" is an inspirational lesson in which the refrain replete with avian imagery ("If you have a broken wing / And you just don't have the strength to get up and try / There's no use in worrying / No, give it time, and once again you'll reach the sky / And you'll be stronger the next time you fly.") only increases in power and significance with each repetition. By the time Green and his chorus of backup singers swell into the song's final moments, it's difficult to stop the chills or the tears.

This is highly theatrical music, so it's odd that the disc so downplays the songs' theatrical roots. Green's vocals and those of the chorus (which includes, among other singers, Rodgers, Eric Millegan, and Scott Coulter) are deeply impassioned, perfectly in keeping with the music and lyrics; but you'll find no mention here of the 2003 production of

Waiting for the Glaciers to Melt at the Midtown International Theatre Festival, no description of the show's plot, no indication that the songs were originally sung by a number of characters rather than just one. A listener couldn't be blamed for being unaware that these songs are even from a stage musical; this diminishes their power only inasmuch as they're among the most inventive and emotionally perceptive musical theater songs written in the past several years.

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On the other hand, this choice may have been a pragmatic one: The show's book was meandering and confusing, an intense psychological examination of a gay man's life and loves while he's waiting for the results of an AIDS test, more notable for what it tried to achieve than what it actually accomplished. The cast -- Stephen Bienskie (recently seen in *Silence! The Musical*), Queen Esther, Matt Zarley, and the aforementioned Eric Millegan -- was superb but had difficulty making the material fly on a dramatic level. Divorced of the book, the music simply soars.

The curious may try to recreate the running order of the songs as heard in the show by playing the tracks in the following order: 7, 3, 1, 2, 8, 6, 5, 4, then 10. ("Joy," heard in track 9, was not in the Fringe production.) But only about half of the show's songs are on the recording, so it's not possible to fully capture the experience of this unusual and captivating piece. Still, what's here demonstrates the brilliance and care of Green's craftsmanship. The disc suggests the need for a complete recording of the score so that it may be preserved until the glaciers do finally melt -- and, hopefully, a long time thereafter.

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