



WOUNDED BEAUTY CD

Monique Lisbon, MonoMusic, 2006

Reviewed by Anne Mallaby

Walk a mile in my shoes...' invites Monique Lisbon, on the second track of her recent album, *Wounded Beauty*. Indeed, our Prime Minister recently drew on this phrase to invite us to pause, to understand, to reflect and to not judge when he offered our apology to the stolen generations. The call is to listen and to discover compassion within ourselves. So, too, is the call of this excellent album, to pause, to reflect and to listen.

From this invitation, Monique takes the listener on a journey, challenging presuppositions of superficial faith, yet affirming gently the assurance of a God expressed in the grace of a loving face and a faith shaped by the freedom to explore.

There is a powerful depth of reflective theology in Monique's music. Whilst the music is warm and strong, it is the lyrics that invite the listener to deeply engage. Grounded in both the disciplines and liberties of poetry, Monique uses metaphor to evoke a level of truth that otherwise has the potential to be lost in cluttered words. The listener would do well to focus on the intent in tracks like 'Silver Grey'. The imagery affirms the need to explore and question rather than become trapped in propositional truths. The evocative 'there's no way through a maze with just one door' challenges a 'fixed' understanding of reality rather than an unfolding and open exploration of journey. Allowing the 'question marks that nag and bother' to be, rather than be clutched, is extended in metaphor:

When I try to clutch the how and why
Like sand, the answers fall into the sea
To break with waves of trust
Before they're silenced by pounding noisy proof

Intrinsic to the lyric is the conviction that faith resides in the 'silver grey', not in the 'black and white' propositions that seek to constrain. And in this reality, the grace of grey offers liberation. There is no need to bind and tighten the 'truth', but rather a freedom to float, or even swim, in a much broader reality. Such lyrics are powerful because they are borne out of experience, painful and challenging. Wonderfully, Monique embraces in this experiential faith, a profound awareness of mystery.

Monique has gathered a group of fine musicians to produce diverse tracks, with fabulous harmonies and significant solo contributions. From 'soft shoe shuffle' to easy jazz and ballads, the blending of instruments

appropriately enriches the album. The rich tones of cello sit beautifully under the voice, and the trumpet and sax dance around the lyric. Each of the featured instruments expand the texture of the music, and enhance the depth of meaning around the work.

Indeed, the first notes of the piano playfully engage the listener, and Monique's own musical skill holds this album together. Her gifting as poet and musician have found a beautiful way to explore and express her experience; experience which, I might add, resonates with our own life stories.

I really appreciated this album, with its depth of reflection and equally fine musicianship. Some of the tracks resonate significantly with the journey I make with people every day, either in local church or theological endeavour. As a local church minister, I will find myself drawing on tracks from this album to express a theology that allows people space to explore and express with integrity. And it will be one of those albums to which I will return when I need to wonder again about my own story.

For more information about MonoMusic: The Music and Ministry of Monique Lisbon, or to purchase Wounded Beauty securely online, visit www.monomusic.com.au

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FRAGMENTS OF HOME: PIECING LIFE TOGETHER AFTER CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE

**Monique Lisbon, Braidwood Press 2008.
Book and CD.**

Reviewed by Mick Pope

CHILD ABUSE is big news at the moment. On one hand we see the Catholic Church trying to make amends, and on the other being totally insensitive. Yet we need not look further than our own circle of friends and acquaintances to find people who have been abused. Spending (wasting) time as I do online (e.g. Facebook) I find people quick to open up to someone who is willing to listen, and have found disturbingly often people who have been abused sexually.

It is this experience that made me all the more keen to read Monique Lisbon's new book, *Fragments of Home: Piecing Life Together after Childhood Sexual Abuse*, Braidwood Press 2008. Clearly written in

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uncomplicated and honest prose, this book takes you through the painful journey with one woman's struggle firstly to recognise and remember, and then to live with the memories of a childhood filled with lies, deceit and despicable evil.

The book's style is to jump back and forth throughout Monique's life. This non-linear approach is actually helpful rather than distracting, as it traces issues that Monique identifies and deals with; it is thematic rather than strictly chronological.

There are many painful moments. For me I was moved to tears by her childhood prayer with her soft toys (I too had, and indeed still have my Snoopy from that age) who shared her night time fears and found themselves on the floor in the morning, displaced by the evil that had taken place the night before. It is hard to write this without those tears, reading about so much theologically upright yet ultimately wrong (to say nothing of pastorally vacuous) statements she has been subjected to over the years.

This is not to say there is no clear theological reflection in the book, on the need for forgiveness, on the power of the cross, and of the desire for reconciliation. What is missing is any naïve expectation that this side of the resurrection all evils will be vanquished. It is important to recognise the eschatological nature of Christian faith, that not everything can be undone, and that scars are better than open wounds. To forgive is not to forget. In the case of sexual abuse in childhood, to forget is to continue to be the victim.

Monique's theology is also deeply Christological. Being able to identify with Christ in his suffering, the fact that evil is not always constrained because all of our actions would be under control, and that Christ himself has suffered evil in the most complete manner and defeats it, ultimately gives her and all of us hope. Quoting Bonhoeffer; 'only the suffering God can help'.

It wouldn't be a Monique project without music and this doesn't disappoint. As well as songs from the 2003 album *If the Truth Hurts* (reviewed in Perspectives) there are a few new songs. The words are found at the start of chapters, illustrating how Monique's music has been a catharsis for her. The music is very well produced, hauntingly beautiful and moving. My own 'favourite' is 'Unthinkable', but there are many others.

I'd highly recommend this book and CD for anyone really, for the abused, for friends and family of those who have been sexually abused and for those in any form of pastoral ministry.

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