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Ballad-playing was a great strength of the late trumpeter/bandleader **MILES DAVIS**. *Love Songs* (Columbia/Legacy) is a collection from his work in the 1950s and 1960s that was put together specifically to illustrate that strength. The nine standards include "Someday My Prince Will Come," "Stella By Starlight," "I Loves You, Porgy," and "My Funny Valentine," featuring Davis sidemen like arranger/conductor Gil Evans, saxophonist John Coltrane, and pianist Bill Evans. Davis' use of a Harmon mute on his trumpet practically created a new language for the instrument. On "I Fall in Love Too Easily" [featured], from the 1963 album *Seven Steps to Heaven*, he sings through his horn alongside saxophonist George Coleman, pianist Victor Feldman, bassist Ron Carter, and drummer Frank Butler.



Brooklyn-born singer **WILL DOWNING** started out as a "ghost" vocalist on 12-inch dance records, then became a backup singer for R&B artists Dionne Warwick, Billy Ocean, and Stephanie Mills. Since launching his solo career in 1988, Downing has used his rich baritone voice to blend both his jazz and popular-music influences. "This one's for the fellas," Downing says to introduce "A Million Ways," the opening track to his latest CD, *Emotions* (GRP). But the disc also includes "Beautiful to Me" [featured], which describes the special relationship between the singer and his youngest daughter. Adding to the poignant tale's textures is veteran keyboardist George Duke, who Downing calls "an especially sensitive pianist who understands what you're saying. Working with George is like being surrounded by a big blanket."



Known for his long association with the Canadian band Powder Blues, Denver-born multi-wind instrumentalist **GABRIEL MARK HASSELBACH** now splits his residence between Vancouver, British Columbia, and Kihei, Maui. On his latest solo CD, *Gabriel's Horns* (Wind Tunnel Multimedia), Hasselbach is also all over the map (befitting of someone who's also worked with John Denver, The O'Jays, Long John Baldry, Heart, and Little Richard). Playing trumpet, flugelhorn, flute, alto flute, and valve trombone throughout, he adds smooth vibes ("Turn On To Summer") and funky guitar ("Groovalicious Bumpus") to his ledger. On the featured instrumental ballad "Soulmates," Gabriel's horns float on the cushion provided by keyboardist and bassist Fulton Tashombe.

# february 2004