

LOUISIANA MUSIC AND CULTURE
OffBEAT
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WALTER JR. *(The Sacraments)*



Lafayette bluesman Walter Jr. has grown more spiritual on his last few releases, and the seven-volume *The Sacraments* marks his most ambitious project yet. Each volume is a single track dedicated to one of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church, with spoken word recitations of scripture passages and prayers culled from the Catechism of the Catholic Church that the listener is encouraged to read while playing the discs. Instead of the expected guitar-heavy bluesy backdrop, Walter plays his Fender Telecaster through various analog effects to resemble an ethereal-sounding synthesizer that's suitable for meditation. The swirling synth sounds are at times spacey and mood altering, intense and unsettling, and occasionally you'd swear you just heard faint echoes of 12th century monks intoning Gregorian chants in a hallowed, stone-chiseled monastery. Toward the end of the last volume, *Anointing*, the cosmic ambience feels as though the soul is about to step into the eternal beyond.

Walter's superior skill as an orator is really what's on tap here. No obnoxious fire-and-brimstone, southern sex-scandalous madman here — instead he speaks in soft, deliberate tones, enunciating each word and slowing to a crawl when reciting important ideas and thoughts. Sometimes he even whispers to engage the listener deeper. He doesn't speak constantly but allows minutes of instrumental interlude between passages for fuller reflection. It's certainly a tome engineered by a mere mortal who's a spiritual medium in every sense of the word.