

Could *No Longer I*, Christian City Youth's latest CD, be heading for big things? Wes Jay thinks so and tells lead singer Nikki Fletcher so over a coffee at Woodlands Manor.

When Christian City Youth began preparations to record its latest album *No Longer I*, no one imagined what musical forces would be unleashed.

*No Longer I* is a gem. This is the best thing that Christian City Youth has ever done. Sure it boils down to personal taste, but I'm going to try and legitimise what some may debate is a premature decision.

Stylistically, *No Longer I* is a slight departure from previous CDs showcasing the fruits of persistence and an untarnished sensibility in creating emotionally charged rock combined with innovative praise and worship themes.

Musically, the group's fifth album is a well balanced exercise. That doesn't necessarily mean guitarists Chad Lakin and Andrew Bennett have lain back from emphasising the authority the guitars have often assumed on previous albums. Rather, the collective creative prowess of each instrumentalist looms large.

Glen Allsop's atmospheric keyboards, particularly on *Thank You* and *One Desire* are given a little more space to assert themselves rather than prop up the melodies. Matt Hawkin's drums undergird each song with strength and consistency.

Simon French's bass slots in nicely, retaining that hard pulsating edge on *Your Way* without being overbearing.

But, the most striking feature of the album is Nikki Fletcher's vocal delivery. While she is not the only singer on the CD, Fletcher has found her feet as a vocalist. Her vocal range has improved and her voice is sounding better than ever. Joe Pringle, Rachel Bennett, Amy Buckle, and Dan Korocz also take the lead on several songs.

If there has been another catalyst for the progression on *No Longer I* it can be attributed to the methods of producer Paul Mabury (Brooke Fraser, The Jive Express, and Reuben Morgan).

Mabury has consciously produced an album that showcases both the spontaneity and absorbing aura of the live band, plus the meticulous production recorded at The Grove studio, the former INXS studio which is now owned by Mark and Darlene Zschech.

Songs like *Goes Out To You* and *More Than* could easily slip into commercial radio playlists bringing the group commercial success and acceptance. But is that the goal?

"That stuff is great, but it's really secondary to what God has called us to do," Nikki states emphatically over a coffee.

"Kids have so much out there in the world for them," she says.

"They have money, they can travel, they have mobile phones, they can have coffee, and they can do whatever they want. The world has everything to offer. Except for the truth and the 'answers'.

“So when they come into church, they find the truth. And they are hungry for it like never before. They’re hungry for God, they’re hungry for truth, and they’re hungry for answers. They find it in the worship,” she explains.

That’s the beauty of Christian City Youth. It’s music that leads people in worship. This is not about the musos. It’s about God – hence the title *No Longer I*.

“At different times, we’ve all had dreams to be singers and members of bands that we’ve wanted to pursue,” Nikki confides.

“I had a solo career sort of happening, Danny was in a punk band, and the other guys had stuff they were pursuing too. But over the past year, all of us have really let go of everything except for pursuing God.

“If kids can get a revelation of *No Longer I* and start living for God and others because they’re two of God’s greatest commands - love him and love people - if people get that revelation, I’ll seriously be happy,” Nikki says, then finishes her coffee.

(630 words approx)