

INTERVIEW WITH MJ FROM THE REALITY ZONE™

- MJ *What do you think distinguishes Christian City Youth from other youth bands?*
- Nikki Fletcher I think the thing that makes us different from other Praise and Worship bands is that we carry a spirit that comes from our church, and from our group of people and obviously that's unique to us because we're not United, or Planet Shakers; Joel or Henry. We're Nikki and Dan and our crew and God has given us a revelation and He's given us a message for our church and young people, but I think that message extends to kids everywhere around the world.
- MJ *The past couple of years has seen a real wave of youth praise and music throughout Australia and the world. What has sparked that?*
- Nikki I definitely think kids are hungry for God. There are kids out there who don't know God and there's so much out there for them out in the world. Kids these days have everything; they have money, they can travel, they have mobile phones, they can have coffee, they can do whatever they want. The world has everything to offer except for the truth and the answers. So when they come into the house of God and come into church they actually find the truth. They are hungry for it like never before, they're hungry for God, they're hungry for truth, they're hungry for answers and they find it in the worship.
- MJ *It seems to me that there's two aspects of your music. On one hand you're a church based worship band. On the other, you've also performed at Sonfest and the Australian Gospel Music Festival. Being a worship leader, does playing at festival present a 'mind shift' for you?*
- Nikki Not really. I stay focused on what God has asked me to do and that's lead people in worship. My primary focus is our church and youth and our services and building that and serving the vision of our leader. As an overflow of that, we tour and take what we have in our church and take it out so the touring is just an extension of that primary focus. So it doesn't matter where we go and what we do. Obviously we adapt in certain ways, so it relates better to different people and different congregations. But at the end of the day we're carrying the same spirit, the same message and all I want is people worshipping. If I go somewhere and at the end of the night, people haven't connected with God I feel we haven't done our job even if we played great and the mix was great and we were tight and people were responding because we were entertaining - that's totally not

what we're meant to be doing.

So I just stay focused on that and say 'God, I just want people to worship you'.

MJ *What do you see as the band's key priority?*

Nikki I think the most important thing is that all of us in the team seek God and have a true relationship with God.

So it's one thing to come to church every week and to know about God and talk about God, but if you're not actually spending time with God every day or regularly and walking with God that authenticity isn't there anymore, so it starts to become about shallow things and yourself. So the number one thing is to spend time with God.

MJ *So why do you think that many Christians don't do this?*

Nikki I just think that life is so easy for us to be honest. We have everything that we want. And it's not until we get into full on crisis like somebody in your family gets really sick, or you get sick, or something really bad happens, that you call out to God.

We've become so comfortable it's almost like we don't need God. Even in church we've got this, we've got that. It isn't a substitute for God but people can get comfortable there.

All of us in the band are so passionate about changing that because, if at the end of your life you just talk about God but don't really know Him, then it doesn't really matter. All that stuff is totally worthless.

At the end of the day all you can take with you to Heaven is your relationship with God and other people.

MJ *Our generation wants everything now. If we don't get our Big Mac within 30 seconds we crack it.*

Is it a struggle for you as a youth leader to present God as what He is, and not as some kind of pre-packaged microwaved fast food?

Nikki I think it's just changing cultures but I think that starts from a revelation within. For me if I don't have a revelation of God and who He is then I can't carry anything to anyone because I have no idea myself. But it doesn't carry anything because it's not coming from a revelation or a conviction - this is what I know. And there's things that God's given me revelations of and I know when I get up to lead worship I know God is real and I know the Holy Spirit is real, because I've experienced the Holy Spirit. I know that God can completely transform your life. I know that God is worthy of our praise regardless of how I feel. Praise is not about me, it's about God.

The more I seek God, the more revelation I get and when I get up on stage that's what I carry and that starts to shift a culture. And that takes time. Sometimes kids don't respond for ages but I don't care, because they will eventually because I'm carrying something and I'm anointed to do something.

- MJ *Talk to me about the album and the album title No Longer I. What has driven that focus?*
- Nikki Our youth has just exploded in the last couple of years. We have nearly 800 kids coming every weekend and there's just such an amazing vibe in the band.
- The song *No Longer I* was written by Dan and Matt. Dan leads worship and Matt plays the drums. It's a revelation that they had but it something that has been happening in all our lives, all the key guys in the band for the last year.
- Basically we've all gone through stuff. We've all had dreams that we've really, really wanted to pursue more than anything else - all wanted to be singers and parts of bands.
- I had a solo career sort of happening and Danny was in a punk band, other guys had other stuff they were pursuing. But over the last year all of us have really let go of everything except for just pursuing God saying we don't care what it takes. We'll all play in youth till we're 50 if that's what He wants us to do. We just want to be faithful with what He has given us and He's given us the kids in our youth ministry. It's not about us any more; it's not about us as musos having careers or dreams. That stuff is great but it's really secondary to what God has called us to do.
- Right now God has given us the youth ministry and the kids. So basically we've put aside everything and let it die but it's still a daily thing. Every now and then when you're on tour and everything is going awesome you think great, I'll have a great career. But I just keep coming back to God and saying, "God, I just want people to be changed by this." It's not about our music career.
- So that's basically where *No Longer I* has come from and we've also just learnt to love each other more - to love God and to love people and just in our relationships amongst the team. The guys in the band are so much more important to me than anything like my songs getting sung.
- I would rather Dan be amazing in his worship leading and see him excel than myself because I just love him so much and I'm proud of him. Putting people first- so "No Longer I" is about putting other people first.
- MJ *That message kind of goes against the grain in our culture and human nature.*
- Nikki Totally. It's definitely the opposite to what the 'world' teaches.
- MJ *How then is the No Longer I concept relevant to young people?*
- Nikki When I was growing up searching for what is it I wanted to do with my life, I was always taught - and especially as a singer because it's really competitive - that you have to pursue this with all your life, every gig, every audition, because you never know who's going to be at the gig, push aside other people for yourself, because if you don't look after then no one will.
- That's the kind of thing that kids are being taught. It's cut throat.

Everyone has degrees. You've got to go that extra mile. Whereas with God it's about losing your life to find it.

So it's actually goes completely against what kids have been taught.

But it's the truth and it's totally relevant because it is the truth and it is the Word of God.

I think it's totally refreshing if a young generation can catch a hold of that and actually put other people before themselves for real - pray for people, support people, give people money when they need it, help the poor or whatever it is God is asking you to do.

Can you imagine how different a world we'd have? It would be amazing. We'd actually be able to start doing stuff for God.

I'm so excited that this is a revelation that we've got and it's something we can start building into our young people.