

# A look inside

Australia's best kept secret is out! Christian singer/songwriter Nathan Tasker opens up about his new album, his music and life.

BY REBECCA ABBOTT

I remember the day when a student in our Year 12 Christian Studies class pulled out a guitar to play. The embarrassment and nervousness we felt for him soon faded beneath the pure honesty and strength of his songs. The impact of the words he sang – about the truth and beauty of God – and the clarity of his music make it the only Christian Studies class I can truly remember.

That guy was Nathan Tasker, and 10 years later he is having the same impact upon audiences worldwide. The single *Your Love Changes Me*, from his new album *A Look Inside*, has placed Sydney-based Nathan in the 10 most played Christian artists on Australian radio<sup>1</sup>, among names like Delirious?, Jars of Clay and the Paul Colman Trio. This CD – the seventh in Nathan's swag – has also defined a new era in the quality and excellence of his music.

"I'm really excited about *A Look Inside* – this album has been a long time coming," says Nathan. "The catch phrase for the album was truth and excellence, and that ran through all the songwriting, recording and everything ... I feel that in the past my albums have been full of truth, in that you can go back to the Bible and see that I have tried to be faithful and honest to what God has revealed as possible. But the excellence hasn't been there."

So with *A Look Inside* Nathan poured enough time and money into the CD's production to make it stack up to the standards of the secular music industry, while maintaining the pure truth of the Gospel in the lyrics. "It was recorded with excellent musicians, we tracked it in a great studio in Sydney, mixed it in New York, mastered it in Nashville. And at the end of the day I'm broke!" he laughs.

Another feature of this album is its personal nature, suggested by the title *A Look Inside*. Nathan sings about his own sin and failings, his dependence upon God and his relationships.

He says: "I think for a long time I've been writing songs that have really been focused on theology, but they've often been almost distant from me. I had this feeling that it's dangerous to put too much of yourself into your singing. Whereas now, I don't feel this is true at all. I think God works through real people rather than abstract ideas."

## The journey

Nathan fell into full-time music while studying to be a primary school teacher. At uni he began playing for Inter Schools Christian Fellowship and Crusader groups, and was then asked to perform at youth groups and church services. "It snowballed over a two-year period, so I deferred uni and started doing this full-time," Nathan explains.

Although, he openly admits that the journey hasn't been smooth. "The first three or four years of doing Christian music I hated pretty much every minute of it. I understood it was a good way of communicating the Gospel to people, but I didn't like the fact that there was so much responsibility. I felt the weight of it. As soon as you strap on a guitar and sing in front of a group of people, especially kids, they take everything that you say as Gospel ... I think I felt that pressure very much, and still do, every time I play."

It was also a lonely lifestyle; while his friends were living the uni lifestyle, Nathan was "out in Condobolin playing to five kids at a youth group!"

However when his best mate was killed in a car accident in 1998, Nathan's attitude to his music changed completely. "The turnaround came when Greg [Van der Kwaak] died. I think I realised the temporal nature of life, and the fact that God has given me a platform and opportunity to be able to speak to people immediately about matters of life and death. Since then it's gone from feeling that my music is an important thing, to something that I enjoy as well."

## The man

Nathan grew up in a Christian home, but didn't become a Christian himself until age 16. He really questioned his faith after reading a book his parents gave him called *No Compromise*, about Christian musician Keith Green's life. "I realised he [Keith] had a personal relationship with Jesus, while I just knew a lot of facts about Jesus. I think that was the first time where the Spirit quickened my heart and I wanted to live differently."

For Nathan, being a successful Christian musician is still about Jesus, rather than fame. "Fame is such an elusive thing – I have no desire for it," he states, adding, "Every morning I wake up and look in the mirror and I see all the things that I'm not, not all the things that I am, and all the things I want to become that God's still working out in me."

Nathan's humble nature (and his sense of humour) come to the fore in his live performances. As he intersperses songs with personal stories and Bible passages, he relates to audiences on such an intimate level that people often feel they know him by the end of the gig and want to share their own stories with him afterwards. And while he has performed over 1200 times, in front of thousands of people, for Nathan the small performances are just as important as those "under lots of lights with a big sound".

He says the most exciting part of his ministry is "seeing people respond to the music in a way that you hadn't imagined they could. My hopes for my ministry through music are often way less than what God wants to use it for. So when I get an email or a letter from someone who has obviously listened to the lyrics and engaged with what I'm trying to speak about, and it's actually brought them closer to Jesus and made them more understanding of his love for them, that to me is supernatural ... To know that my song is part of a process someone will go through to becoming a Christian, that's pretty exciting."

And his music has also become an integral part of Nathan's own spiritual development. "As I create something that I'm trying to minister to people with, I actually find that helps to shape who I am as a Christian as well. When I write I am learning a lot about who I am and who God is, how much he loves me ... I think that's a very humbling thing to be able to listen to your own work and see that it's more than just you, that God is actually working through it."

## The future

It's been a big year for Nathan, with a trip to the United States to perform and promote his new album, a national tour with Roma Waterman in June and a wedding to his fiancée, Cassie, still to come in December.

Through it all Nathan tries to maintain a grasp on reality by visiting friends, regularly attending Bible study and church in Sydney, and finding time to read Christian books.

And with his feet firmly grounded, Nathan is casting his eyes towards a major future in music. In the next five years he hopes to have made a few more albums – "with better songs and a better sound" – and to be playing more overseas.

However, with his trademark humbleness and faith, Nathan is quick to acknowledge that his future lies in God's hands. "Every plan that I've ever made in my life hasn't happened in the way I planned it, so maybe it's a bit presumptuous to desire anything for the next five years," he speculates. "But I certainly feel myself moving in a certain direction now and I look forward to following that path until God puts a door in front of it and says 'no more'. When that happens, I'll do something else. There's always other ways to tell people about Jesus, and this is only one of them." ■

<sup>1</sup> According to The Rock Across Australia radio activity charts, 31 May 2004



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"... when I put my guitar on, I really sense the importance of what I'm doing."

