

NATHAN TASKER - a look inside

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The rest of Australia will soon be hearing what Sydneysiders have been keeping secret for the past 11 years.

Christian singer/songwriter Nathan Tasker is stepping out across the nation to promote his sixth album of faith-inspired songs.

While the CD *A Look Inside* has quietly slipped into Christian record stores, Nathan isn't planning a full-on promotional tour just yet. The main effort will begin soon and will mark a big turning point for this young performer who clearly has what it takes to be the "next big thing".

The Sydney-based artist first performed publicly in 1993 and has since developed a loyal following across many denominations with his writing, singing and public speaking.

His ministry has included visits to schools, churches, conventions, prisons and youth groups as well as annual visits to churches in the United States, Western Europe, the UK and South Africa.

Nathan, 28, has used his formative years in the international Christian music scene wisely. He has submitted himself to a wide range of audiences to learn his craft, to refine his songwriting talent, to mature in faith and to set the foundation as a performer.

He has performed more than 1200 times to thousands of people so he knows there is nothing quite like the judgment of one's peers to put him in his place.

"I try to make my performances interesting and engaging, fun and serious so you are always dancing on the edge of vulnerability," Nathan said recently during a visit to Melbourne after completing "A Look Inside".

"In a show I share a lot, sometimes too much. But I would rather do that than not share anything at all.

"I am very fortunate in that I get a lot of feedback from people about how the songs have impacted on them. I got an email from a man who decided he wanted to end his life. He was driving off to do that and as he was driving he thought about the lyrics to one of my songs. He drove back home and found the CD that it was from, "Life This Side of Heaven". He said that he had played it every day for the last 18 months and he reckons it has kept him alive. Later on he came up to me and thanked me."

The 10 tracks on "A Look Inside" were mixed in New York City by Ben Wisch (Marc Cohn, Bebo Norman, Caedmon's Call) and mastered in Nashville by Ken Love (Cindy Morgan, 4Him, Delirious? dc Talk, Rebecca St James). It combines stylish pop melodies with lyrics that reveal a depth and maturity beyond his years. Some of the songs were written more than three years ago and came out of the sense of loss and grief from the death of a close mate Greg Van der Kwaak in a car accident in 1998.

"I didn't play or write anything for six months," Nathan said. I struggled with what it means when God takes someone that you care about. It forced me to think about some very big issues. Pain and suffering, and God's involvement in it was no longer theory for me.

"There's a certain level of honesty that you get to where you start to deal with the common area of life which is what it means to be human. If you are really honest then your story becomes a lot of other people's stories. That is what drives me to write songs that are honest and deal with the way I feel."

Fortunately, after a long period of grieving, prayer, reading the Bible and soul-searching, Nathan came out of his personal tragedy with hope and inspiration for more performing and recording.

"Now more than ever I am committed to truth and excellence," he said. "That is a major part of my personal goals. I am a part of a group of people and an industry and one of the things I want is to spur us on to do things that are full of truth and excellence. I want people to see the time and effort that I put into my ministry.

"In the circles I move in, particularly in Sydney, when you are young and singing about the kind of things that I do, such as truth, people look at me and think: 'He's young, what does he know?' But now I am seeing that change because after all these years, my audience expects the truth.

"Most people can get nine songs into a half-hour slot. When I play a gig, I am only getting three or four mainly due to my desire to communicate by speaking in between. For me, writing songs is about communicating. I want people to connect and one of the ways I found that I can do that is by explaining the song. For some people that is their way in and they can understand why I wrote the song so it becomes their song.

"I have always seen what I do as communicating. I have never rated my singing. I have never rated my guitar playing but when you put it all together something worthwhile happens."

Nathan was born into a Christian family in 1975 and taught himself how to play the guitar and a few Christian songs. But it was the life and music of Keith Green that became his biggest influence.

"During my early years of high school I had not really embraced Christianity as my own so the Keith Green connection came in at the beginning of Year 11 when my parents gave me a book about his life.

"They sucked me in because they told me it was about a musician so I was eagerly reading to find out more. It turns out it was about a Christian music and I found myself drawn to Jesus through it. That was the turning point in my life.

"I had started studying to be a primary school teacher and I had never thought about being a Christian musician at all. When I left school, other schools started inviting me to their Christian groups to play these songs and I played them happily.

Then I was invited to the youth groups and then the youth groups invited me to the Church groups and then it snowballed. I deferred university and by that time I had crossed over to a Bachelor of Arts. I was about half way through that and music took over."

Nathan found that building a career as a Christian musician was a double-edged sword. "It was a love-hate relationship because while I had the opportunity to perform, all my friends were at university and going to parties and the beach," he said.

"I would be at a youth group playing songs for five kids. It was very lonely and I did not enjoy that aspect to it. Plus we had so many bookings coming in that I was out all the time and a lot of it was by myself.

"My sisters now take care of a roster of people who come out with me as a part of my crew to help with CD sales and make it so that I don't have to spend my time alone."

If the rest of the world responds to Nathan and his latest album like his home town supporters have, then you can be sure that in 2004 he won't have any trouble filling the roster.

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