

Rebecca St. James Gets Her Praise On with New Album

✖ After spending the last couple of years pursuing an acting career, Rebecca St. James returns to music this month with the release of *I Will Praise You* on Beach Street Records. She discusses her new music, her acting career and her fiancé.

It's 20 years since your first release, in Australia; what do you think when you hear it now?

Oh my goodness, most people don't even know about that one. I think I was 13 years old. I kind of blush a little bit when I hear that album. I sound very, very young and slightly pitchy.

This new release marks a change in label for you. How did that come about?

Well, it was actually a beautiful experience. Mark Miller, who is the head of Beach Street Records and also my producer with this album, he produced Casting Crowns—just an amazing Christian man. We had lunch and talked about doing this album, and he said, 'Rebecca, I'm just praying that if I could be a good steward of your ministry, that God would show me that and show us that we'll (get a) green light to work together.' So I just loved that this producer was just going to God about this opportunity for us to work together, and both of us had such a sense of peace with the whole team. I really saw God's hands on the process of this album.

What was the writing and recording process like?

At the time I was writing the album, I was also working on a new book that's coming out fall of this year with FaithWords, a book called *What Is He Thinking?*. For that book I was interviewing guy friends of mine about dating and romance and all of that, and I was also writing songs for the new album. I

wrote some of it in L.A., which is where I live, and some of it in Nashville, which is where I used to live and my family is still there. It was quite a process and still doing shows in and amongst both of those things. It was a busy time, and I really saw God's peace on the whole process and it was a great experience.

Is there a theme or thread throughout the recording?

Well, it's a worship album so all the lyrics are very vertical in nature. I'm kind of teaching in a lot of my albums and in what I share from the stage and just wanting to share things that will be relevant to people and in their lives and be encouraging. On this album some of the themes are the kindness of God, because that's really what draws us to Him, His gentleness and love. Then there is the act of surrender, just how important letting go is, and that's something God has been doing in my life. We even talk about beauty and self-image, God redeeming our pain. We talk about fear.

How does the new album differ musically from previous recordings?

It was actually much more simple, the process, because generally on the front end of an album, we do a lot of programming and planning, lay a foundation, get a feel for what we want it to sound like. With programming this time around, we just went into the studio, I didn't even have a key I was singing it in before we went to the tracking session with the whole band in the studio. It was much more of an organic process and I think people can hear that in the musicality. There is kind of a softness and warmth of this album that people are really responding to.

You've grown up in the Christian music world and are known for speaking out on pro-life issues and being a model and champion of abstinence. Has all that ever been a burden?

The purity message has been the mainstay of my ministry. The

only way that had become at certain points a little bit of a heavy message to share was when I was feeling kind of lonely in the single department. I got engaged on Christmas Day. Now being in the engagement period, preparing for marriage, it's a real fulfillment of a lot of dreams. It's a lot easier to talk about that and not feel a bit of the sting of 'I'm still single and I don't necessarily want to be.' But the purity message, in essence I really have enjoyed sharing about because I think it's a need-driven message.

Tell us a little about your fiancé.

Absolutely, I love talking about him. His name is Jacob and we actually met through a philosophy group that I was attending for a while in Los Angeles. He is an absolutely wonderful man, probably the most gentle, balanced, kind, loving man I have ever encountered except maybe my dad and brothers—just such a good man. I said to somebody recently if I had to do it all again, I would wait for him because he is such a joy. So it's wonderful to be about to embark on this marriage. We are doing premarital counseling right now.

Does this new release mean that your movie “detour” is over?

That's yet to be determined really, by God. I'm open to doing more acting. We've even got two different films that are on the table right now that we are talking about me doing roles in. We'll just kind of see and play it by ear. I've probably been involved in five or six films since I moved to Los Angeles a couple of years ago. Sarah's Choice, the pro-life film, was one of those and it's been an incredible ministry experience for me. The last year I've been traveling and doing fundraising events for pregnancy centers and doing an hour or so of music and showing the movie. It's been really awesome to meet these amazing people that work at pregnancy centers and they are doing just such life-giving work. We'll just see if God brings up opportunities that definitely have a rightness about them.

How has acting enriched or changed your music?

In some ways, being away from the music scene for a little while has made me appreciate the gift of it even more. Sometimes just having a little change creatively helps you come back with fresh new energy. I really sense that. I think the other thing that has been driven home with acting is that to communicate with people and for them to connect on a heart level with it, it has to be authentic. An actor friend of mine, before I went on set for Sarah's Choice, said, "Just like in your music, Rebecca, you want to be authentic and share your heart. Bring your heart to the table on camera. And in that character's set of circumstances, bring yourself." So I think, if anything, being involved in acting has just driven home something that I already know and that's it's important to be real and authentic and coming from that very honest place.

You mentioned a new book coming soon?

I think this is my favorite book of my life to write because I'm a very curious person, so I love asking questions. The book is called What Is He Thinking? and it's coming out in the fall, and I actually got to just question guys about their thoughts on love, dating and romance. It's fascinating now because I'm engaged and I'll be married before the book comes out. I guess we could say it worked.

Which is harder, writing music or writing books?

Writing music, for sure. With writing books, you're kind of dealing with one medium. You're dealing with words and craftsmanship with words and honesty and pulling from your heart. With music, you are pulling from multiple mediums because you've got the musical, which is powerful on its own, then (when) you put words together with that, you definitely have a vehicle that changes lives. But dealing with the two different mediums creatively makes it much more challenging.

Sometimes you have writer's block, or you're not feeling so inspired and you want something fresh and it's not coming. It's a trust experience writing for a new album.

What are you listening to on your iPod?

I have really been soaking in lately quite a few Hillsong songs. I grew up going to Hillsong's church in Sydney for a few years. That was a real influential time in my life. I was 10 or 12 when my family and I went to that church and was part of that community. Lately I have just been soaking in songs like "None But Jesus" and "Mighty to Save," just really claiming those lyrics in my life.