

Bebo Norman: Light of Distant Cities

Listening to a Bebo Norman album is, honestly, like reading a chapter of his own personal journey. Every two years, Norman allows listeners a glimpse into some of his deepest—and even darkest—thoughts, prayers and fears. “When you finish the record, you have this chronicle of what has happened. You have a clearer picture of what God has been doing in your world,” says Norman.

His new album, *Lights of Distant Cities* (BEC), which released Tuesday, is the result of years of walking through a dark, spiritual desert, as expressed in his last album, *Ocean*, and finally finding what he was looking for—God’s promise of light, hope and love.

Norman said for a while he felt numb, but in the process of writing *Lights of Distant Cities*, “God just sort of gave me this season of recovery. He gave me this gift of emotion again.”

In “Sing of Your Glory,” the first track written for Norman’s eighth studio recording, there is a sense that Norman is still in a place of unknowing, and that’s when he began to write, “I’ll sing of your glory/ Now and forever.” It was just what he needed to transform this album into a musical expression of joy, peace and revelation.

For the first time, Norman co-wrote *Lights of Distant Cities* with longtime friend and live collaborator, multi-instrumentalist Gabe Scott. “He brings so much to the table,” said Norman of Scott. “He creates beautiful musical landscapes.”

Together they came up with tracks such as the powerful “Wine from Water.” “I won’t say anything/ When the silence is

threatening/ There are miracles still unseen/ We are wine from water." Norman says it's so important to allow God to speak into the silence.

In the upbeat tune "The Broken," Norman sings to God: "Can Your hands of glory reach down and heal the hurt of the broken?"

In many of the tracks from *Lights of Distant Cities*, Norman encourages listeners to let go of all that holds us back from fully giving ourselves to God. This thought is evident in "Collide." "I've seen beauty in my hands/ Kissed her mouth and watch her turn to sand/ All these things and still I hold on tight/ To the alters I keep building in the sky."

Over the years Norman has wondered if his acoustic style was still relevant. He admits he doesn't always know what an audience wants or what will work commercially. "That's not why I started writing songs in the first place."

Norman says this unknowing has given him freedom to just write. It's "this natural outpouring. ... This is what I love. Not from a selfish perspective, but a creative one. This is what moves me. I'm going to let it be what it is."

Sarah Breed is a freelance journalist from Lakeland, Fla.