



JONATHAN BUTLER *FREE*

Jonathan Butler has spent a lifetime writing and recording music that uplifts and encourages others, but as he penned songs for his latest album, *Free*, available October 30, he had no idea God would use his own work to minister to him in a powerful and unexpected way.

"I've been through a fire and all kinds of challenges. It's been a crazy three or four years," Butler says. "So this album is a testimony of God's goodness. With the timing of all these things happening to me and in the midst of all of that, writing a record was pretty heavy."

When Butler speaks of going through a fire, it's not a metaphor. A candle caused a fire in his California home and Butler suffered second-degree burns rescuing his seven-year-old granddaughter from the blaze. "I wrote 'Be Encouraged' the morning of the fire," Butler shares. "It was five in the morning and I couldn't sleep. God gave me those words to 'Be Encouraged.' God is on the throne. At seven o'clock that night my house was on fire and all I remember is being in an ambulance with burn marks and thinking about the words that God gave me early that morning."

Butler recovered from the fire, but continued to face other challenges, including the loss of loved ones and seeing people closest to him struggle with difficult issues. Yet God kept His hand on Butler and helped him through it all. "I was going through quite a lot personally and I wanted to make that statement very clear on this album that I'm in a new season in my life," he says. "It's a new chapter now. I wrote 'Moving On' which is a declaration of where I'm finding myself in my life right now. God has taken me to a whole other level, a whole other place in my life. It's just been a journey of seeing God removing the low hanging fruit to make room for a tree to be stronger and bear more fruits. All the songs on the album have really moved me because I've been living all of what this album is saying."

The songs on *Free* are a testimony to the power of faith and the goodness of God's mercy. Never has Butler sounded more passionate than on this collection. The opening track, "You Are The One," is a buoyant celebration of God's faithfulness and the joy in Butler's voice is contagious. "Where Would I Be" is a tender ballad that serves as a prayerful thank you to the heavenly Father for His love and guiding hand. "I Am That I Am" is a beautiful worship anthem. "I wrote that one morning sitting at the piano in the studio," Butler recalls. "I just wanted to glorify God as God through His creation—the oceans and trees, and the mountains roaring the sound of His voice. I had only one thing left and that was to stay as close to God as possible through my trials and through the journey that I've been through. I wanted to write a song to give Him glory."

Free was produced by Luther "Mano" Hanes, who also wrote the songs "Where Would I Be" and "Never Find A Better Love." Butler and Hanes previously worked together on Butler's *Brand New Day* album. "I really wanted to make a record with Mano because we've worked so well together before. I just felt he would be the right fit for me and he would understand what I wanted to say on this album," Butler says. "He's an anointed man. He's a Godly man. He's very sensitive to what the artist is going through. We talked for hours and he would say, 'JB, all I want to do is capture everything you are and what God is taking you through.' He did it. It's all on the record and I feel like it's the best record I've made in a very long time."

The title track is a special song to Butler, who says he drew inspiration from his own life as well as the story of Joseph in the Bible. "I wanted it to be about Joseph and how I saw my life intertwined in the same kind of way," he says. "I was sold as a child to the lowest promoters on the planet, being exploited in show business. My parents did that so there would be food on the table and money in the house, so I wanted that song to really speak directly about the parallel to my life."

Yet the song Butler says is most personal to him on the album is “New Day.” “We try to understand everything in life and some days we can’t even see what a new day brings to us,” he says. “Sometimes we’re so caught up in the issues of life and what we fail to recognize is strength in the morning. Every word in that song is true. I’ve had to live that for four years.”

The performance heard on the album was recorded in one take. “It was just Mano and me in the studio. We prayed and we began to worship God,” Butler shares. “He was in the control room and I was in the vocal booth. I was on my knees in the vocal booth and I remember sobbing like a child before God. The presence of God was so heavy, the atmosphere in the room was so thick and I said, ‘Let me sing,’ and the glory in that room that came through and we just did it. It was like God just showed up. I sang it once and he said, ‘Hey man, I don’t think we need to do another vocal take. This is it.’”

A native of Cape Town, South Africa and the youngest in a family of 12 children, Butler began singing and playing guitar at age seven. Well respected in the jazz and R&B fields, as well as the gospel arena with his iconic Grammy®-nominated hit “Falling In Love With Jesus,” Butler is one of the few artists who successfully and seamlessly blends the genres into his career and live shows. Butler signed his first record deal as a teen and became the first black artist played on white South African radio stations, winning a Sarie Award, the South African equivalent of a Grammy, for the hit single, “Please Stay.” Butler lived in England for 17 years, and today makes his home in California, yet his artistry continues to pay homage to his African roots.

One of the most uplifting songs on the new album is titled “Sing Africa.” “I wrote ‘Sing Africa’ probably six years ago in Johannesburg at a friend’s studio,” Butler remembers. “I was just so excited to be home and so excited to experience South Africa now that it’s a free democratic society. ‘Sing Africa’ is a celebration of how far we’ve come. There’s no looking back, no turning back. Even when South Africans are singing a ballad, they sound happy. I hope this will be an anthem in South Africa in church because praise and worship in Africa is so different from anywhere else I’ve experienced it. You’ll see a 90-year-old lady get up from her seat and start to dance in the aisle in church. That’s the love and joy they have in their hearts for God. I wanted to capture that and put it on the album.”

Community is very important to Butler and he credits friends at the Dream Center in Los Angeles and at El Paso’s Destiny Family Christian Center, where currently he leads worship, with helping him during this challenging season in his life. He has been sharing his new music with them and is encouraged by the response. “I want this album to belong to the body of Christ,” he says. “I really feel there are worship and praise songs on this album for the body to embrace and sing. My vision is to hear it in every church.”

Continuing to circle the globe maintaining a comprehensive worldwide tour schedule, Butler’s life is a prime example of how God can bring a person through challenges and truly make them **Free**. “I’ve learned a lot during this season in my life,” Butler says. “I’ve learned to trust God and obey Him. I know 100% that God has called me and I just want to serve Him. Every week, I can see God moving and touching people’s lives and working through me. It’s been an amazing journey.”

Jonathan Butler · Free
Rendezvous Music · Release Date: October 30, 2015

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