

Brandon Heath

Blue Mountain

A great song can carry us to another place and a well-crafted album can introduce us to a whole new world. Welcome to *Blue Mountain*. With his latest collection, **Brandon Heath** opens the door to an intriguing locale, populated by saints and sinners, perpetually overflowing with powerful truths and soul-shaking observations on life and humanity.

There could be no better tour guide through *Blue Mountain* than Heath, one of Christian music's most beloved and respected artists and songwriters. A two-time GMA Male Vocalist and five-time GRAMMY nominee, Heath has delivered some of Christian music's most thought-provoking anthems, including the 2009 GMA Dove Award-winning Song of the Year, "Give Me Your Eyes" and "Your Love," which topped the charts for an amazing eight weeks. A Nashville native, Heath began writing songs in his teens and gained a national audience with the release of his 2006 Reunion Records debut album, *Don't Get Comfortable*. His warm, expressive voice and intuitive songwriting have earned him an enthusiastic fan base and the respect of his peers.

He follows his chart-topping 2011 album *Leaving Eden* with the vibrant landscape of *Blue Mountain*, his fourth studio record. The album is filled with the type of signature story songs that have made Heath an influential voice of his generation, yet sonically he fuses his engaging pop template with the rootsy sounds of his childhood. "When I was a little kid, my grandparents lived outside of Knoxville, Tenn. Every time we would go to visit them, we'd go to Cades Cove and Gatlinburg," he says of soaking up the sights and sounds of Appalachia. "I always remember being struck by those mountains and my imagination would run wild and think they were the backs of dinosaurs. I've always just been intrigued with those mountains."

Most of all, Heath has always been fascinated by people and it's his penchant for exploring human foibles, triumphs and challenges that provides the foundation for *Blue Mountain*. "I wanted to get out of myself a little bit on this one," he says with a grin. "I like to write story songs and I like characters. I wanted to create some characters, but I needed a framework. In a conversation with my friend Al Andrews, who I always get a lot of song ideas from, he commented that he had read somewhere that some people can be like Blue Mountains. In the distance, they are mysterious and majestic and you can't touch them, but when you get up close to them, you realize they are just brown and green. They aren't blue at all. For some reason, that got my mind going. So, I started writing songs about different characters---the coal miner, the farmer, the guy who is on death row."

Yet, even as he was indulging his imagination and creating a vibrant cast of characters, Brandon had an epiphany. "I realized that while I was writing this record about other characters, really it's about me," he says.

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One of the most personal songs on the record is “Paul Brown Petty,” a lyrical portrait of Heath’s maternal grandfather. “He’s just always been one of my heroes,” Heath says. “You never heard him complain. He worked in his garden every day. He was an elder at his church. He sang in the choir. He fought in the war.

When things were really rough here in Nashville with my parent’s divorce, I could always go back to Waverly, Tenn., which is where my grandparents lived. I always felt at ease around him. A lot of people will never know who he was, but he made a big impact on me. He was a part of building my character and my story; through this song I hope to pay tribute to him.”

Another mentor that Heath tips his hat to on his new album is Bob Goff, founder and CEO of Restore International, a non-profit organization addressing the injustices committed against children. “Love Does” yields a warm, engaging melody and compelling lyric that encourages believers to make a difference. “Bob is a world changer,” Heath says. “He liberates people and I don’t know if there’s anything more noble than that; than getting people out of bondage. He’s dedicated his life to that and he’s been such a great role model to me. He’s written a book by the same name and now more people are hearing his story.”

The first single from *Blue Mountain* is “Jesus in Disguise.” “Jesus isn’t always in the obvious,” Heath notes. “But from busy city streets to the rural roads of ‘Blue Mountain,’ Jesus is always there to be found. You just have to know what to look for and be willing to look for it. It’s been a burden; it’s still a burden for God to open my eyes, so much so that I’m still writing about it after all these years.”

In recording *Blue Mountain*, Heath collaborated with some of his favorite Nashville songwriters, including Lee Thomas Miller, Luke Laird, Barry Dean and Deana Carter. Once he crafted the songs, he hit the studio with producer Dan Muckala. “I wanted to take on a whole new flavor,” Heath says of fusing pop, hip-hop beats and Appalachian roots music.

The album was recorded at Echo Mountain Recording Studio in picturesque Asheville, N.C. “We rented a cabin and we lived there for 10 days while we worked on this record. It’s a cool place,” says Heath of the studio where Dierks Bentley recorded his *Home* album and MercyMe recorded its current disc, *The Hurt & the Healer*. “Dan did MercyMe’s record, so that’s how he knew about the studio. He said, ‘We need to take your Blue Mountain idea to Asheville; I know a great studio that’ll give us the perfect setting.’”

The album is as inventive lyrically as it is sonically. One of the most poignant tracks is “Dyin’ Day,” the story of a death row inmate. “I wanted to write about a guy who had led a life so evil that it ultimately put him in prison where he’s since lost his identity – he’s been reduced to his prison number. The redemption is it’s here that he finds a level of forgiveness that most of us don’t even allow ourselves,” Heath explains of the fictional character. “He’s a man who has been cut off from the world and hasn’t seen forgiveness from his family or society, yet he understands forgiveness so deeply and that’s amazing to me.”

Forgiveness, servanthood and the power of grace are topics that have been woven throughout Heath’s musical repertoire, but never have they seemed to coalesce into a more potent musical offering than on *Blue Mountain*. “I want people to feel loved and comforted because that’s what I feel I can offer through the songs on this record,” he says. “I hope listeners will take a journey with me; that they’ll step out of their lives for a moment to explore *Blue Mountain* and its’ characters. My hope is that they’ll find themselves there.”