

With its first two albums **Tenth Avenue North** managed to fuse truth and music in a potent blend that left listeners engaged, entertained and inspired. The band does so yet again on its third Reunion Records album *The Struggle*, a 12-song collection that explores the themes of grace, forgiveness and redemption through thought-provoking lyrics anchored in an adventurous sonic landscape.

The band's recent history is pretty impressive. Since its 2008 debut album, *Over and Underneath*, Tenth Avenue North has become one of Christian music industry's most successful acts, saturating Christian radio with such memorable songs as "Love is Here," "Hold My Heart," and "By Your Side," a number one single that was *Billboard* magazine's No. 3 overall Christian song for the decade. They won New Artist of the Year in 2009 at the 40th Annual GMA Dove Awards and in 2010 "By Your Side" was named Song of the Year.

The band's 2010 sophomore album, *The Light Meets the Dark*, debuted at No. 1 on the Nielsen Christian SoundScan chart and No. 15 on the *Billboard* 200. The album hit the No.1 Christian Album chart position at both iTunes and AmazonMP3, reaching Top 5 on iTunes' Overall chart, propelled by the lead single, "Healing Begins." The compelling ballad "You Are More" was 2011's No. 1 Song of the Year on *Billboard*'s Christian Audience Chart.

As the band approached its third album, it would have been easy to take an "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" attitude, but the word complacency is not in its vocabulary. Band members Mike Donehey (lead vocals), Jeff Owen (guitars), Jason Jamison (drums), Ruben Juarez (bass) and Brendon Shirley (keyboard) took a totally different approach in how they wrote and recorded *The Struggle*. Instead of waiting until they got home to Nashville to begin recording demos, the songs were written and demoed on the road while the band was on tour.

"We wrote 'Don't Stop The Madness' in January of 2011," Owen says of the confessional anthem. "That's when we first started writing as a band and we were recording demos as we were writing. On the last two records, Mike would write most of the songs with Jason, or on his own. He would show up and the song would have lyrics and melody and acoustic guitar, and then we'd take that and make it our own. We'd put a beat to it and shake it, but this time we started basically from scratch."

Recording on the road led to some interesting sessions. "When we recorded, 'Where Life Will Never Die,' there was an amp in our bathroom," Jamison says with a smile.

"Sometimes there were things on the demo that we couldn't replicate in the studio," Donehey adds, "so we ended up finding the files from the demo and putting them on it. We recorded drums in the front of the bus at one time. They sounded amazing."

The Struggle is also the first album to include the two newest members of Tenth Avenue North-- Ruben Juarez and Brendon Shirley.

"Ruben and Brendon are more technically knowledgeable than Jason, Jeff and I are," says Donehey. "They really added to the musical structure of these songs. Plus, we all get along so well creatively, I couldn't see doing this record without them."

In an innovative twist, Tenth Avenue North invited fans to be part of the creative process and invited them to sing on the record. "It started on the Third Day tour," Owen says of the trek last fall. "We sent out Twitter and Facebook [messages] to our fans and said, 'Hey, come sing on our record.' We have people from Nebraska singing with people from Fargo and Albuquerque."

In various cities on the tour, the band would invite fans to show up and then they'd record their voices to add to different songs on the album. "It's cool," Donehey says. "These are the people that support us and listen to this music. It is music that affects their lives and now they are actually a part of it."

Working again with producer Jason Ingram (six-time winner of SESAC's Christian Songwriter of the Year award), the members of Tenth Avenue North have crafted a sonically diverse record that mirrors the passion and intensity of its live show. "We got a lot of comments over the past several years about how our live show is much different than our recorded music," says Donehey. "It has more energy and more of a rock edge to it. We try to be more musical and create different moments, so I think going into this we wanted to make sure we were aware of our live show and how these songs were going to play out live."

As always, the band was ever mindful of the power of its songs and the messages in its lyrics. Though the word "struggle" tends to evoke thoughts of challenge and strife, leave it to Tenth Avenue North to illuminate the possibilities and show that struggle is ultimately a privilege. "Hallelujah! We are free to struggle. We're not struggling to be free," Donehey sings in the title track.

"We want to give people permission to struggle, to realize that there's grace and you don't have to be good enough," says Donehey. "It's the theme of a lot of our music, but we also want to challenge people to not stay there, to not stay in that place of struggling. There is power and there is grace, not only to forgive your struggle, but to redeem you from the struggle. . . We're going to struggle until the day that we die, but we don't have to struggle to earn what God has provided for us."

The lead single, "Losing," is a song that challenges believers to forgive because we've been forgiven. Offering forgiveness may sometimes make you feel like you're "losing" but only in showing others the grace God has shown us are we truly free. Such powerful yet poetic messages continue to populate every song on *The Struggle*. "Strangers Here," inspired by Hebrews 11 reminds us of better things to come. As Donehey sings the emotional lyric he urges us to remember that this life is only temporary and one day we will touch the face of our God.

"Worn" is a tender ballad that acknowledges our human frailty and the rest that awaits in our heavenly Father's arms. As a young father, balancing the responsibilities of music ministry and raising two young daughters, Donehey is well acquainted with physical and emotional exhaustion; and in the song, he shares one of the most vulnerable vocal performances on the record. Yet even in the midst of struggle, fatigue and alienation---all emotions every human battles---the songs celebrate the sovereignty of God in every aspect of our lives. Song after song, the band offers up the kind of lyrically substantive lyrics people have come to expect from Tenth Avenue North wrapped in the most adventurous music they've ever crafted.

"Grace" boasts a vibrant melody and some of the record's most compelling lyrics as Donehey sings: "Grace, only grace can roll your dead heart's stone away. Grace only grace can move us to a rhythm that can changes our ways." "We're going to struggle until the day that we die," says Owen of the song's message, "but we don't have to struggle to earn what God has provided for us."

"All the Same" acknowledges the fact that though we might appear very different on the surface, at the core we are all the same, desperate for the love of God. "You Do All Things Well" is yet a soothing prayer that celebrates the power of God to meet our every need. The worshipful chorus is a soaring celebration of God's majesty.

Tenth Avenue North has come a long way from sharing the Gospel with students at Palm Beach Atlantic University in West Palm Beach, Florida to playing for more than a half a million people in concert last year. It's a platform and privilege they take seriously. "When I'm playing, I look out and I can see people's eyes," says Donehey. "I've always carried an ache for people. I want people to experience the freedom I've experienced. I want people to experience the forgiveness I've experienced."

Music can provide a healing balm to those breaking hearts and through its music, Tenth Avenue North continues to shine a light not only on the struggle, but the hope that changes lives forever.

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