

MANDISA

Freedom

“These songs are true to me; they’re songs I identify with,” says Mandisa about her sophomore album, *Freedom*. “I can’t wait to start singing them because they reflect my story – the things I’ve been through, and the things I’m still going through now. Each one means something special to me.”

The anticipation for new music from this celebrated vocalist is great. Aside from last year’s critically-acclaimed holiday project *It’s Christmas* (2008), the AC and pop-flavored *Freedom* is the follow-up to Mandisa’s 2007 debut, *True Beauty*, an album that created history by becoming the highest chart entry and made her the best-selling debut artist in the life of her label, Sparrow Records. It also became the only female debut to hit No. 1 in the 27-year history of *Billboard*’s Christian Retail Chart. *True Beauty* received a GRAMMY® nomination for “Best Pop/Contemporary Gospel Album, the single “Only the World” became a Top 5 hit at Christian radio, and Mandisa was lauded one of the “Best New Artists of 2007” by multiple media outlets.

And as if that weren’t enough, there’s this: In the past year alone, Mandisa has made appearances on “TODAY,” “Live with Regis & Kelly,” “CBS Early Show,” “Fox & Friends,” “Extra,” “TV Guide Channel,” “E! News Radio” “Huckabee” and “Associated Press TV.” She even discussed Lindsay Lohan and addiction with “CNN Showbiz Tonight.” In 2009 Mandisa will be speaking out to thousands of women across the U.S. as she becomes part of the celebrated Women of Faith events.

Needless to say, Mandisa has been established as one of the most promising new talents in the Christian music industry. But she takes nothing for granted, and is quick to point out what’s truly important to her.

“I grew up watching the Grammy® Awards – seeing my favorite artists perform, win their awards and give speeches,” Mandisa shares. “There is something about being nominated for a Grammy® that is just such an honor, and because I know the history behind it, it certainly meant a lot to me and was a highlight this past year. But as a Christian artist, you try not to get sucked into watching things like chart positions and how many albums are being sold because I recognize that what I do really has more to do with the impact it has on lives than whether or not it’s padding my bank account.”

Mandisa approaches everything with that same humble, self-effacing perspective, which is part of what has drawn people to her since she first appeared on TV screens before an audience of millions just a few short years ago. Don’t forget how this incredible musical journey began – with a spectacular run of performances that led Mandisa into the final rounds of “American Idol’s” fifth season. It was during those first few months of 2006 that she became a household name and garnered a multitude of fans as she wowed audiences with her powerful voice and contagious smile.

Those months were the beginning of major change in Mandisa’s life – in more ways than one. They were certainly the launch of a promising new musical career, but they also represented another turning point for her. When “Idol” judge Simon Cowell made negative comments about her weight on national television, it was a shock to Mandisa and to many of the millions who were cheering her on. She admits now, as she has discussed at length in her book *Idol Eyes: My New Perspective on Faith, Fat & Fame*, that those hurtful words cut deeply, causing a lot of immediate pain and embarrassment.

“My struggle with weight has been the biggest struggle of my life and it began as a very young girl,” she says. “There were certain things that happened to me as a child, just different situations of abuse that I talk about pretty freely and pretty openly but as a result of that abuse I started to turn to food to feel comfort and to fill that void that was left as a child and what I have learned is that the only thing that will satisfy me and the only thing that will truly give me comfort is the Comforter and He is the only one that can fill that void. And so one day at a time I have been set free or I am being set free from what I call is a food addiction. I

believe that you can be addicted to alcohol and drugs and for me I believe that I have been addicted to food for several years. And so it's been a journey, it's been a very difficult journey, but it's a journey that I'm overcoming one day at a time. As I speak, we are about 2 months away from this record releasing, and I have lost 60 pounds. But, I have to say, it is about more than eating, and more than exercising. Of course those things have to be a part of this, but it is truly what my first single says it is because my Deliverer has set me free from all that has held me captive and I just believe that this is, again, it's going to be a lifelong journey for me but as long as one day at a time I am getting closer and closer to being set free that's all that I can ask for and I believe that that's happening."

Since the months and years that have followed her days on American Idol, the debut CD and book, Mandisa has realized how much that experience and everything she learned from it has given her a platform to reach out to others through her music. It became a major part of the songs she recorded for *True Beauty*, but she has gracefully moved into an even deeper understanding of who she is now and what she wants to communicate through the new collection of songs she recorded for *Freedom*.

"With *True Beauty*, I felt like the Lord was teaching me at that time that my value doesn't come from my outward appearance, and it doesn't come from what people think of me or how successful they think I am," Mandisa says. "It really does come from inside of me, and it comes from what *he* would say about me.

"The same is true with *Freedom*," she continues. "I realized that the theme building in my life right now is the theme of freedom. There are many things I've not conquered, but to actually be able to say that God has freed me from some things in my life is... well... freeing! I can see the work he's doing in my heart, and it's definitely being reflected in the songs I'm writing, and the songs I've been drawn to as we put together this album."

The jubilant first single, "My Deliverer," is a perfect example of the empowering message that builds the foundation of the entire album. With its buoyant pop/funk track backing her up, Mandisa sings with a carefree confidence about feeling more alive than ever.

"If there's any one song that truly reflects what God is doing in my life, this is that song," Mandisa explains. "My struggle with weight has been, and will probably continue to be, the biggest battle of my life. There are certainly physical ways in which I'm now taking control of that addiction, but more important than that, it's a spiritual warfare issue for me as well. I have to ask for God's help every single day, so I know that it's going to take a whole lot more than any diet plan or any exercise plan to set me free. He is truly my deliverer who is setting me free from all of this, and he's the reason I'm so excited about being able to sing this song."

Mandisa continues the theme with the urban/gospel stylings of "Freedom Song," one of several tracks she co-penned with songwriters Matthew West and Sam Mizell. Complete with a gospel choir and B3 organ, Mandisa lets loose on this song she calls a "praise party" about freedom that can be found in Christ. "I wanted to do a song that was from the perspective of a lot of different people – a mother and wife who has lost her identity, a child who is from a broken home or maybe a man who has been bound by addiction for several years. All of us, no matter what our circumstances, can find freedom in Christ. And when you've found freedom like that, you've got to shout it out."

Producers Brown Bannister and Christopher Stevens expertly guided these songs between styles while staying true to Mandisa's own personality and character. They were able to extract a range of some of the most powerful and poignant performances from this artist to date, including "He is With You," which re-teamed her with writer Ronnie Freeman, and is one of Mandisa's personal favorites on the album because she believes it hits every single situation anyone could imagine. As she says, "No matter if you are a man or a woman or black or white or young or old, God is with you and God loves you and God will never leave you and He will never forsake you."

One of the album's most stirring songs is its final track, "You Wouldn't Cry (Andrew's Song)." It holds a tender place in Mandisa's heart because it was written for a new friend she made this past year who was pregnant, but whose baby boy, Andrew, was stillborn. "I wanted to do a song from Andrew's perspective – about what he would say if he could speak to his Mom right now from heaven and comfort her." Co-written with singer/songwriter Cindy Morgan, the song's tender verses and melodic refrain, perfectly delivered by Mandisa's clear, crisp vocals, are sure to be a comfort to all who have lost loved ones in their lives.

More than anything else, that sums up the heart behind *Freedom*. It's simply an outpouring of what Mandisa is learning through the relationships she has with those God has placed in her life, and the relationship she has with him.

"These songs mean so much to me because they give me an opportunity to share with others what I've been through, and what I've learned from so far on this journey. It really is true freedom to know that the Holy Spirit is the great comforter. So no matter what people are going through – whether it's abuse, the loss of a child, or not having money to pay the bills – there is a God who loves you and is with you no matter what. I know when I go through difficult times, the best defense I have is to worship him, because when you magnify God, your issues look smaller. He can bring us out of whatever we're going through and even use it for good, and for His glory."