

## The Afters

### *Light Up The Sky*

A clean slate. A fresh start. A renewed perspective. These are all things The Afters are thankful for.

After losing their longtime friend and manager to a two-year battle with pancreatic cancer, two band members deciding to part ways, a nearly life-threatening car wreck and a new member losing a close friend one week after joining the band, The Afters have never been more grateful for new seasons. And this season's a good one. Holding on to their faith and their passion for making music, the new line-up—including founding members Josh Havens (lead vocals/keys/guitars) and Matt Fuqua (vocals/guitars), along with new members Dan Ostebo (bass) and Jordan Mohilowski (drums)—headed into the studio to craft *Light Up the Sky* (INO), the most accessible album of the band's career.

"The story behind *Light Up the Sky* is a part of the story of all of us," says Fuqua. "[It's] a picture of what it looks like when you make it through [a] really challenging time, and you look back and see how God was using all of those things for good and that you were never alone."

"When we started writing this record, we sat down and talked through all that we'd been through and started looking for God's fingerprints in all of it," explains Havens. "It was amazing to see how constant He was in everything. We had so many signs along the way that He was with us."

Despite the tragedy and turmoil leading up to recording the record, the band members agree that the recording process for *Light Up the Sky* ranks at the top of their recording experiences thus far. "The chemistry in the band and with our producer [Dan Muckala] has never been better," says Havens. "It was the most fun I've ever had making music. It was a refreshing period for us as a band and as people, and I think *Light Up the Sky* reflects that."

Musically, the new songs are filled with layered harmonies and nuances. The band experimented with mic placements during the recording process, placing mics in hallways and in their producer's garage in an effort to capture ambient sounds. "There are a lot of textures and subtleties that the listener might not notice until they've listened a few times. I think [the album] is instantly accessible and yet has deeper layers for those wanting to find them. It's artful pop," adds Havens.

Sonically, *Light Up the Sky* is somewhat of a departure from the grunge rock of the band's debut. Instead, this collection of songs tends to lean more pop. Though music categorization is not something the band worries about. "I personally don't really know how people 'classify' our music," says Fuqua. "I don't really even think about it. I think about a lot of things like 'What is my responsibility to the poor [and the] hungry as a Christian?' I think, 'Am I being a faithful husband and father?' And I hope that focus and love is felt in our songs and that those will be the things that define us."

With an emphasis on "building soundscapes" for this record, The Afters once again partnered with longtime producer and friend Dan Muckala (Brandon Heath, MercyMe). The band also collaborated with Muckala in writing efforts as well as talented songwriters Jason Ingram, Nate Company and Brandon Heath.

"Writing is like journaling for us," says Havens. "I don't keep a diary, but I write songs about the experiences I go through in life."

"As a songwriter and musician, crafting your gifts should always be a forward progression," adds Fuqua. "I see the songs on this new album as the culmination of the last six years of our life. You can hear in the

lyrics how we have been maturing as writers and musicians [and as] parents and husbands. But even more so, I think you can hear the spiritual progression as we have seen God working in our lives in so many ways."

The songs on this new collection vividly reflect the faithfulness of God amidst hard times, something the band is all too familiar with. Havens and Fuqua wrote "Life Is Sweeter" following the deaths of their manager and their new drummer's lifelong friend. The song is an ode to a beautiful, abundant life on "the other side."

Songs like "Lift Me Up," "I Am Yours" and "We Won't Give Up" reaffirm the band members' faith and the source of their strength; while cuts like the title track, "Start Over" and "For the First Time" reiterate the theme of rebirth. "I love that in life, tomorrow is a blank page," says Havens. "The beauty of grace and redemption is that we never have to be weighed down by what's in the past or let our mistakes and regrets define us. Every day is a new opportunity to live with meaning and be the person we were made to be."

One of the band's favorite tracks on the album is "Say It Now." "A breakdown in communication is at the heart of many broken relationships," Havens explains. "Life is too short to not say the things we have on our heart. Whether it's words of encouragement, letting those you love know how you feel or talking about the difficult things that, when ignored, can build up and lead to anger and resentment; speak your heart."

The 10 new songs on *Light Up the Sky* are spoken from the heart and stem from hardship, perspective and a reprioritized set of values. The band has even rearranged its touring schedule to ensure they are home on Sundays to lead worship at church and that family time is a priority. "After 10 years of marriage and three kids, I know now more than ever what it is I value and how I want to live and raise my kids," says Fuqua.

Havens echoes the significance of intentional living: "We can't put off the things that matter. Now is the time to live for the things that are important."

For The Afters, the renewal they've experienced transcends more than just their music. Restoration follows rebirth. They've come full circle, and they are enjoying the process more than ever before.

"God brought us through," says Fuqua. "[He] has really restored the excitement and life we had when we were kids making music for fun at the coffee shop."

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