



Nicole Sheahan

Nicole Sheahan is a singer/songwriter and is currently a BYU student. Interviewed Sept. 20, 2008. Website: nicolesheahan.com

How did you get started with music?

I've always loved to sing, but I didn't get serious about it until a couple years ago. I took a songwriting class here at BYU from Ron Simpson, and I just realized how much I loved to express my life experiences through music. It was a really therapeutic thing for me, and I found that sharing it with other people was even more exciting. When I first came to BYU, I thought I was going to study French or maybe something math- or science-related, because I knew I loved music, but I didn't know that I could actually pursue a career in music. Once I took the songwriting class and realized that I could write songs, I just started writing, and I love to do it. I would write songs every day if I could.

What's your major?

I'm a media music major. I applied a year and a half ago and put my whole heart into the audition, but then I got the letter saying I didn't get in and that I'd have to wait another year to try again. When I got that letter, I felt this peace from Heavenly Father. I got on my knees and said, "Okay, if this isn't what I'm supposed to do, then there's something else I'm supposed to do, and I know you have something you want me to do." I felt like I needed to trust Him. That's actually what my song "In Your Hands" is about—I wrote

the song after that experience, and it really helped me to learn to trust Heavenly Father.

Then a few weeks later Ron Simpson, the director of the media music program, called me up and said that a spot had opened and they wanted me in the program. I said, “What? Are you kidding?” I was so surprised but grateful. I’m glad it happened that way, because I learned more about myself and why I want to pursue music, and it also made me realize everyone has a different road to get to where they want to be. Heavenly Father needs us to use our gifts in so many different ways, and every person is unique. It made me have a stronger testimony that He has a plan for me and also for every other person.

What music has influenced you as a person and as an artist?

There are a bunch of artists who have influenced my writing—Stephanie Smith, Cherie Call, Nichole Nordeman, and Natalie Grant are the top four. That was the music I listened to all the time. I would listen to

their lyrics and the music going along with it, and even before I started songwriting, it just amazed me how they could tell stories that I could relate to and how their stories, through music, could impact my life—how I think and how I act. The artists who have influenced me the most are the ones with strong and powerful lyrics that say something new.

Have you had any mentors?

Ron Simpson has been an amazing mentor to me. He really cares about the people who are in the media music program at BYU. He wants us to succeed and to use music in a way that will change the world. He wants us prepared to be able to share strong messages with the world.

Another mentor is actually someone I’ve never met: Kenneth Cope. I sent him a message one time on MySpace, thanked him for his songs because they’ve had a big influence on me, and asked him to listen to a couple of my songs. After he listened, he asked if we could trade CDs. I was really excited about that. Ever



since then, we've emailed back and forth. He's helped me see that God sent me here to earth with these specific gifts and passions for a reason, and that I have to work hard to understand how He really wants me to use those gifts. It's funny because I haven't met him, but one of these days I'm sure we'll meet in person at a concert or a show.

Could you tell us more about the media music program?

I love the media music program. It focuses on songwriting, film scoring, and sound production. I actually didn't know it existed until the end of my freshman year. It encompasses a lot of the main music major classes and then has specific classes like sound recording and film scoring. A lot of schools don't have this—it's a blessing that BYU offers the media music program, because it's so important that we have people who are prepared and trained to make quality music, both on a small scale and on a large scale. With all the inappropriate music and lyrics coming out, we need people who are making music that is uplifting and that has intriguing lyrics and beautiful music to go along with it so people can listen to good music with a good message.

Can you tell us a little bit about your genesis as a songwriter? What was it like writing your first song?

I was at a Soundcheck Seminar, which was a seminar we had every week with a bunch of different musicians from around here. I went to it the first night and was a little overwhelmed. I hadn't written a song yet. I'd tried—I'd written a lot of lyrics, but I'd never put them to music. I knew I really wanted to write songs but was almost scared to start because I'd never done it before. I didn't know if I could do it or how it would turn out.

That night after I left, I was walking back to my car, feeling overwhelmed because there were some famous people at the seminar and I thought, "They're so good—I don't know if I can do this." Then a thought came to my mind, a feeling like Heavenly Father was telling me that as long as He knows me, it doesn't matter if no one else knows me—that I can do these things I wanted to do, and that I can do anything as long as I rely on Him and put my trust in Him. And "As Long As You Know Me" was the first song I wrote. The melody and the words fell into place. It took a lot of work, and I rewrote a lot, but that song was a lesson I needed to learn—to not get overwhelmed with how many people there were trying to do the same thing, but to remember



that each person has something important to offer, and I too had something I could share with other people. I have to believe in myself and I have to believe that God knows me, that I'm not just part of a crowd, but that I'm important to Him and His plan. That was the first real song that I wrote.

How did your album Invisible Facts get its start?

I had no idea I was going to record an album. My producer, Jacob Luttrell, was teaching artist development courses here in Provo and in Orem. I'd heard what an incredible performer he was and had heard everyone rave about his songwriting and performing skills, and then I saw his fliers, so I took a few courses with



him. We were working on songwriting a bit, and then we started recording a few demos, and I really liked his style—his production arrangements fit so well with my music, and he was really easy-going and easy to work with. I felt comfortable sharing my songs with him and letting him come up with arrangements for the songs with the other instruments, so then I talked to him about whether I could afford an album. I had no idea how expensive recording costs were. My dad and I combined our money and decided to record an album, and Jacob produced it.

We were supposed to finish recording a lot earlier than we did—dates got pushed back and with school it wasn't as easy to have the time to get into the studio to record—but when I look back on the process, I think it took longer for a reason. There were a couple songs I didn't write until we were in the middle of recording, and I feel those songs really needed to be on this CD. "Why I Believe" was one of those songs. About a year ago I got a bad cold, and I didn't want to record with my cold voice. It was disgusting. So, we took some time off and didn't record for a while, and during that time, I felt like Heavenly Father taught me a lot of things. He taught me to be more humble and to really rely on him more for everything. Even though a cold isn't a life or death

situation, it made me realize how I can receive strength from the Savior no matter what I'm going through—even the small things like a cold or having a bad day. I started writing "Why I Believe" in that time, and I felt like that song really needed to be on the album. I've had a lot of people say that it's their favorite song. It's my favorite too, because it's about the things that are most important to me. It's my testimony.

How do you see the gospel influencing your music?

The gospel has influenced my music a lot. It can't help but affect the way I think about everything. There's a line in "Why I Believe" where I say, "I used to be so much different, my heart's not always right where it should be, but I've felt the Savior's power to change my soul inside, and I know there's a way back because He died." I'm not a perfect person—and none of us are—but I've seen how the gospel and the Savior's atonement have changed my heart, making me want to be the person Heavenly Father wants me to be.

I'm able to learn from my experiences—success and failure and all the different things we experience in life—in a way that helps me. The hope that through Heavenly Father and the Savior you can become

whatever person you want to become completely affects my music and my songwriting. Even when I fail, if I'll look up to Heavenly Father, He'll help me see something I can learn from that. Those are the things I love to express the most through songs because those are the things that are most important to me. The gospel has helped me think more positively about life's experiences—about turning them into learning situations and just getting back up again, remembering that even if something doesn't turn out the way I expect, that's okay. There's a plan. There's a reason for everything.

What was the transition like in becoming a singer/songwriter?

At that Soundcheck Seminar, one of the people in charge of the seminar would always say, "Don't say, 'I would like to be a singer/songwriter.' Say, 'I am a singer/songwriter,' or 'I am a writer,' or 'I am an artist.' Say what you are, and you believe it, and you become it." I took that advice, so when people would ask me what I do, I'd say, "I'm a singer/songwriter," even though at first I'd only had one song that I'd written. You don't have to have all this success to say that's what you are—if you believe it, then you are it. So the transition was kind of quick. I feel I've become more of a singer/songwriter and a better performer because I've believed it.

Where do you find your gigs?

A lot of shows lately have been through word of mouth. I don't have a manager right now—I don't feel like it's the right time for that, and it's expensive too—but starting out I'd just talk to friends who were

performers and ask if I could open for them. Or I'd go to open mics and play, and people would ask if I wanted to play for them, and different opportunities would arise. I'll play wherever, whenever—I want to take any opportunity that comes, because I love to share my music, and the only way to improve is to just do it and take those risks. Even through doing shows where only five people are in the audience, opportunities will come out of that.

Last year I got to open for Jericho Road and in October I'm opening for Alex Boyé. It's kind of crazy to me because three years ago, when I didn't know I could write a song, I would listen to Alex's CD and loved his music. When he asked me if I'd be one of the openers at his show, I said, "Are you kidding?" It was a huge blessing to be able to share my music with more people.

Where do you see things going in the future with your singing/songwriting?

I'm not sure exactly what's going to happen in the future, but I know I'm going to continue writing songs. I want to record another album in the next couple years, but I want to wait until I feel ready for that, because I'm trying to figure out if I want to stay an independent artist or sign with a local label. I also want to continue performing. Over the summer I did this songwriting competition and got a song on the Mormon Battalion CD that's going to be released in a few months. That was a new experience for me—writing something that wasn't about my life—so I had to research and study it. It would be cool to write for other projects as well. I'll be graduating in 2010, and finishing up school is going to open new doors and give me ideas as to how I can use my music to lift others and also make a career out of it. ■

