



Audrey Assad didn't find a title for her new album, *Heart*, so much as the title found her. Scanning scribbled lyric sheets backstage one night, the Nashville singer-songwriter was struck by a message she didn't fully realize she was sending.

"I saw 'heart' just popping, popping, popping from the lines," she says. "I erased 'heart' and rewrote it in red everywhere that it appeared. That was such a striking image to me: This is what I have to say right now."

The imagery in the 12 songs that make up *Heart*—out Feb. 14 on Sparrow Records—beamed love, life, change, growth, how faith figures into all of it. Matters that are deeply imbedded in — and deeply evocative of—the heart.

It was all coming out right now, the 28-year-old singer found, because her own heart was processing a pivotal point in her life and career: the experience of being a brand-new wife and a singer-songwriter following up a breakout album.

Assad married William Gene Price III in February of 2011, some six months after the release of her Sparrow debut, *The House You're Building*, which ushered in critical accolades — iTunes dubbing it 2010's Christian & Gospel "Breakthrough Album of the Year," Amazon anointing it 2010's Best Christian Music—and a consistently brisk touring schedule, alongside the likes of Chris Tomlin and Tenth Avenue North.

The intense emotions tied up in both experiences had a sizable impact on *Heart*.

In album track "Lament," Assad measures the battling sides of her own personality: feeling drawn to busy productivity, and knowing that she needs to step back and trust in her faith. In "The Way You Move," she ponders the complexities of love: "I know that the hardest part of love is not the things I have to give," she sings, "no, it's what I give up."

"I've been learning a lot -- what love means and what it doesn't mean, and how much it really truly does require of you," Assad says. "One of the things I've learned I think is that love is free and you cannot buy it, you cannot earn it, you can't even deserve it most of the time. But once you accept it, it takes everything that you have."

That understanding -- that love is a process, that it requires your whole heart—informs Assad's life as a newlywed and as a maturing singer-songwriter, and it grew up out of a period of focused seeking.

She came out of the first few months of touring behind *The House You're Building* feeling artistically unfocused, emotionally frayed, and “really uncertain of what my role was in this whole culture of Christian music, and music in general.”

The confusion spurred her to study her own heart: to figure out what she really loved, what she wanted, what she needed to share.

“I realized, ‘I have to go after this and figure it out,’” Assad says. “I need to have a vision, I need to have something to be driven about.”

She focused that heart-first drive—and the road-honed musicianship that built up over more than a year of almost non-stop touring—into the writing process for *Heart*.

Assad penned 30-plus songs over four months, re-teamed with *House* producer Marshall Altman to hone 12 of her best ones, and hit the studio with a focused vision for recording them. Assad wanted the sessions to be intense, the results distinctly honest, so she locked down with her band in an Asheville, N.C. house and tracked together—no distance, no distraction.

"It was honestly ethereal to me," Assad says. "I was in heaven. Everything in the core of this album was done live together, and we pretty much found the best take and kept it. I think me having the confidence and the vision and us being in a space where we weren't fettered by anything, it all converged into a moment. What you hear on the album is that moment."

To Altman, the album’s refined piano-pop melodies also reflect the benefits of all that touring, in a clear leap forward in Assad’s musicianship.

“There are some different colors on here—there's some programming—but it's all built around Audrey as a musician," he says. “And to me that was a critical element on this record. I think it shines because of who she is, not just as a writer and a singer, but really as a musician too.”

As a lyricist, the bloom of confidence led Assad toward a broader, more personal approach. *Heart* beams her faith less bluntly, more as an indelible part of her worldview, more like a conversation with friends. It paints an open, honest picture of Audrey Assad’s heart, as an artist, as a woman: It wonders, it questions, it seeks and finds comfort in faith.

“I’ve grown a lot—and that is realizing I don't know myself yet,” Assad says. “(*The House You're Building*) was, ‘Maybe I’m this person, maybe I’m that person.’ This time I started realizing: I don't know that yet, so let me just be who I am right now.”

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