

Natalie Layne
All Joy

Joy. Natalie Layne radiates it. From her original songs to the way she talks about Jesus, the Centricity Music recording artist is filled with joy from head to toe. Joy is also easily the common thread woven throughout her introductory album, aptly titled *All Joy*, a debut offering that speaks to the power of finding the good in moments that don't necessarily feel good.

Prior to signing a record deal, Layne cultivated an impressive social following online as an independent artist by inviting listeners into her songwriting process. Moreover, she studied under GRAMMY® award-winning songwriter and producer Bernie Herms (Natalie Grant, Josh Groban, Barbra Streisand) through an apprenticeship that allowed her to shadow him for a semester. She's headlined full band sets at Bonnaroo — twice — and toured with Danny Gokey, Brandon Heath and Tenth Avenue North, among others. Additionally, she was one of the first Christian musicians to be named an “Artist to Watch” by Pandora. In 2023, she released her first batch of music with the six-song *Amen* — the title-cut of which became a Top 20 hit at Christian radio, followed by the tender “Fragile.” Five months later, she dropped *Amen (At The Piano)*, a stripped-down version of her studio EP produced entirely by the songstress that showcases her remarkable talent as a classically trained pianist.

As Layne began working on the selections that would round out her first full LP, *All Joy*, a pattern emerged in the writing rooms she found herself in. During open conversations with her collaborators, she realized they all had one thing in common: Everyone was going through very real, very hard things, but yet, they were all still managing to find joy and gratitude in the midst of life's challenges.

Although she didn't begin the album's creative process with this specific theme in mind, Layne knew what she intended her debut project to sound like. The Colorado native wanted to find a way to embed deep, theologically rich lyrics into melodies that evoke delight. With her signature piano guiding her sonic instincts, Layne straddles the line between contemplative pop and a rare blend of jazz and funk all rolled into one.

Found near the end of the 13-song set, the title-cut — written by Layne, Jeff Pardo and Ethan Hulse — aces her litmus test of blending thoughtful words with cheerful tones. Inspired by the Scripture passage found in James 1:2-4, which urges believers to “*count it all joy...*,” the upbeat number is a blueprint for the secret to discovering an all-time high that so often feels elusive. “Joy is a Fruit of the Spirit. It's right toward the beginning of the list: ‘*Love, joy...*’ So, that must mean it's kind of important, right?” Layne asserts, referencing Galatians 5. “Joy is not a fruit of anything other than the Spirit. Joy is not a fruit of our own striving. If we want more joy, we have to ask for more of the Spirit.”

The record's namesake also encapsulates the spirit of the entire creation process, which included Layne working with producers like Pardo, David Spencer, Chris Clayton and Christian Hale. Additionally, Layne self-produced three of the album's 13 tracks — one of those being the melodic intro to anchor selection “The Long Way,” which transports listeners straight into the writers' room.

Co-penned with Pardo and Krissy Nordhoff, Layne explores the winding path that often leads to answered prayers on the masterfully crafted “The Long Way.” “In most good things in life, the Lord takes longer than we would like Him to take. He could do it in a moment, but more times than not, He doesn't take us straight from point A to point B. Instead, He takes us along the backroads,” Layne observes. “The interesting thing about it is, once you get to the destination — even if you get the thing you're asking for — you care less about it if you've gone the long way, because it's not about the thing anymore. It's about how you got more of Jesus along the way. That's really the road to joy.”

In addition to writing about joy, Layne also found herself naturally drawn to the topic of thankfulness. Exuding the sentiment, lead single “Amen” hones in on the seemingly insignificant gestures that can

make a big impact. “I started thinking, ‘What if there was a song where we could say ‘amen’ to all the good things happening in the world and not discount the hard things?’” she shares. “We need to acknowledge the broken things, but there’s actually a higher reality at work in the world. There’s still joy even when hard things are happening. Grief and gratitude can co-exist.”

Viral TikTok track “Grateful For” follows suit. Layne commenced the bright chorus the same way she begins most of her songs — by playing a series of notes on piano. As she started plucking out a lighthearted melody, her co-writer, Mitch Wong, observed, “That sounds like gratitude.” So that’s the exact perspective the pair, along with Jimmy James, set out to capture that day. “I smile every time I listen to it,” Layne says. The immediate standout also caught the ear of the Recording Academy, who invited Layne to create an exclusive performance video of the celebratory declaration for their “Positive Vibes Only” series.

While her sonic direction is as welcoming as a friend and as cohesive as that of a seasoned act, the message behind Layne’s confident music stems from personal experience. After growing up in the church, during her teen years, Layne recognized she had to make her faith her own and determine what she believed apart from her parents. This became even more crucial when she began leading worship under the mentorship of respected worship pastors such as Cory Asbury, Jon Egan and Jared Anderson. She co-penned the originals that comprise *All Joy* for that teenage girl in the thick of unraveling her own convictions.

“I want to talk about the power of staying. Sometimes finding the Lord for yourself and choosing to stay can be harder than leaving, but life with Jesus really is better,” she shares, pointing out the message behind her relatable new anthem, “Church Kids.” “I want to write songs for the lifelong church kids, but at the same time, I want people who have left or who are far off to hear these songs and be called back home. No matter which end of the spectrum people find themselves on, I want to give them permission to feel like their story matters.”

That doesn’t mean our stories are always overflowing with the essence of joy. “I want to be honest about how life is hard and God is good,” Layne offers. “Those two things can be true at the same time.”

This adage has even proven accurate across the creative construction that built the scaffolding for *All Joy*. “This has been my dream my whole life,” Layne says of assembling her first full-length effort with a label. “There’s been so much joy surrounding making this record and meeting the people I’ve made the record with.”

With the songs lined at the starting gate, ready to make their way out into the world, Layne simply hopes her music becomes the soundtrack for everyday moments. “I believe the enemy has been trying to steal joy from people, and I just want these songs to be a shot of joy,” she says. “I picture these songs being played in the car in the school drop-off line or in the kitchen when families are making dinner. I think we need joyful songs to get us through the day sometimes, and God’s given me a lot of permission to go for the happy songs.”