

# Ayiesha Woods

With only one album, celebrated singer/songwriter Ayiesha Woods accomplished more than most artists achieve in a lifetime. Its title was unassuming and self-explanatory, but *Introducing Ayiesha Woods* did more than merely introduce her: it established her as one of the most precocious and promising new artists in Christian and gospel music.

A GRAMMY® nomination, a Dove Award nod for New Artist of the Year, appearances in a number of high-profile tours, and universal acclaim were some of the highlights of Woods' initial time in the limelight. It's a winning streak that is bound to continue with *Love Like This*, her second Gotee Records release.

After so many early accolades, Woods could've easily rested on her laurels and just offered more of the same, but she's not one to shortchange herself. What's more, she's quick to recognize that she's only partly responsible for all of her milestones.

"I had high expectations, but God exceeded them," Woods says of her success to date. "It was an amazing response all across the board—from believers, from nonbelievers, from people that are lovers from all kinds of music."

Indeed, the impressive cross-section of listeners who latched on to her music the first time around is largely representative of the sound and spirit of *Love Like This*, an album that further asserts Woods as an artist that can't be easily categorized.

"I've always had an appreciation for all kinds of music," Woods says. "I've always listened to music in different genres. When it comes to writing music, I've never been one to just be comfortable with the same ol' same ol'."

Blame her eclecticism on a combination of musical inspirations and upbringing: Influenced by the likes of Commissioned, Lauryn Hill, India.Arie, Chris Botti, and Brian Culbertson, to name but only a few of her favorites, Woods spans sensibilities and inclinations, which are in no small part a byproduct of growing up in New York, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Texas, and Bermuda.

That cosmopolitan vibe has opened a number of doors for Woods, most notably the chance to minister through song at numerous Women of Faith events, where audiences have been able to find common ground with the singer's authenticity.

"No matter who we are or what status or our background or where we come from, we all are in need of a Savior," Woods says. "Those women connect with something that they can relate to. It's just like a huge slumber party really—getting with women that share the same struggles and can rejoice with the same victories."

That transparency lies at the core of *Love Like This*. Produced by Chris Stevens (tobyMac, Group 1 Crew) and Jamie Moore (Mandisa, Falling Up), the album sees the songstress stretching her artistry to places once unvisited—not just musically, but also in the realm of songwriting, where she learned to create in tandem with other collaborators.

"It was a bit of a challenge," says Woods, who was previously used to tackling things on her own. "As a songwriter, your songs are like your babies—you tend to be really protective. That

was me. But we can do so much more and things could be so much greater when we are open to new ideas and taking advantage of new opportunities.”

“Love Can’t Wait” attests to this growth, as Woods delivers introspective verses about the selfishness of man, all to an understated, alt-urban sound—only to explode into a fierce pop/rock refrain about the urgency of love.

Pop is at the forefront of the empowering “Never,” a breezy number where Woods contrasts divine and earthly friendship, only to conclude that the constancy of the former is no match for the latter. In the same reaffirming vein, the buoyant title track “Love Like This” is a worshipful prayer that Woods wrote in her late teens, but that somehow manages to capture the singer’s unending quest for more intimacy with God.

Woods picks up this theme with the waltz-like “Take Me There,” a tremendous ballad underpinned by swirling strings, pop elements, and the vocalist’s soaring, soulful alto. Just as touching is the spot-on reinterpretation of Jennifer Knapp’s “Refine Me,” a heartfelt confession that Woods succeeds at making her own.

Inspired by new life experiences, including the recent blessing of home ownership, Woods wrote “New Beginnings,” a carefree, urban-pop paean that reflects the season of faith and favor she’s relishing today. Woods knows where every good and perfect thing comes from, so she sings about it in “Alive,” and “Because of You”—one an off-the-wall, synth-laden stunner, the other a sunny, cheerful declaration of purpose.

This ability to seesaw between styles is perhaps Woods’ strongest identity mark, but when it’s coupled with honest-to-goodness sincerity, it’s utterly disarming. That’s the case with the dizzying “Transparent,” a song with so many nuances it would be ineffectual to try to list them all. More importantly, the track is reflective of where Woods stands at the moment: a woman who wants to be known for the company she keeps.

That’s the heart of *Love Like This*: an outpouring of all the love lessons Woods has been learning along the way, which unequivocally stem from her own time spent at the feet of the Master. It’s a message she’s passionate about regardless of venue—it can be a crowd of 10,000 women or a roomful of 10 of her most ardent fans.

“One thing that I’ve always been able to recognize in my relationship with God is that my relationship with him is reflected in the relationships I have with others,” Woods says. “If my relationship with God is not where it needs to be, it’s reflected in every other relationship. I need to keep that line of communication where it needs to be.”

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