

FRANCESCA BATTISTELLI



Prayer changes things. Just ask Francesca Battistelli.

Two and a half years ago, the singer/songwriter set out to create the follow-up to 2014's *If We're Honest*. She intended to make a worship record. It seemed like a logical artistic direction following a string of critically-acclaimed collaborations with Bethel Music and the massive success of her version of "Holy Spirit," which earned Battistelli her first GRAMMY® Award. However, as she and her husband, Matt, began to pray before each co-write, what emerged wasn't congregational worship anthems. Instead, empowering pop songs started surfacing, and track-by-track, Battistelli began to build her fourth studio LP, *Own It*.

"I thought I had a handle on what this album was going to be, but Matt and I prayed before every songwriting session, and God gave me a completely different set of songs than I was expecting," she reveals. "We definitely took some songs from the first batch, but so many came in at the eleventh hour that it would've been a completely different record two years ago."

Despite the lengthy process to complete the album, *Own It* arrived at exactly the right time, ushering in a new season for Battistelli personally and professionally. Since her last record, she took a hiatus to give birth to not one, but two babies. In addition, she and Matt took time to re-evaluate how to balance touring and family life to ensure Battistelli is home as much as possible with their four children: Eli, Audrey, Isaac and Wyatt. It's a challenging balancing act considering the fact that for the last 10 years, Battistelli has become one of Christian music's leading vocalists.

With one GRAMMY® win and four career nominations, two K-LOVE Fan Awards, six Dove Awards (including being named the Gospel Music Association's Artist of the Year) and seven No. 1 singles, Battistelli's list of accolades is impressive. The singer has also appeared on "Good Morning America" and "FOX & Friends" and seen her music placed in a variety of high-profile films and television shows.

Yet, with four young children at home—all 8 and under—it would be understandable if Battistelli decided to trade in her mic for motherhood and put her career on hold indefinitely. Instead, she chose to remain faithful to God's direction. *Own It* may have taken more time to deliver than she would have preferred, but it became a personal declaration that God's call on our lives is rarely one-dimensional.

"I feel like I'm in a season of my life where I am walking in more authority and freedom and just ownership of who I am and who the Lord has made me to be," Battistelli asserts. "This is where He's put me, and I have a unique voice and something to say. The fact that I have four kids, and the Lord is still allowing me to do this, tells me that there's something He wants me to say."

Together with a long list of talented friends, including Seth Mosley, Mia Fieldes, Ellie Holcomb, Matt Maher, Josh Bronleewe and Tommee Profitt, among others, she co-wrote all of the album's 10 tracks, with the exception of "Defender," a worship favorite originally recorded by Rita Springer. Radiating messages of empowerment, identity, self-worth and confidence, *Own It* finds Battistelli embracing her imperfections and allowing God to define the woman she's become.

"I've learned it's important to own the season you're in. Own the time it takes to get to where you want to be, not looking too far forward or too far back, but just saying, *this* is a gift," she shares. "I'm tired of walking in half of what God's given me. I want to walk in all of it. I want to own it."

She clearly owns her emotions on clever lead single "The Breakup Song," written two years ago in her living room with MercyMe's Bart Millard and David Garcia. After learning her mother had been battling panic attacks and intense anxiety, Battistelli had her mom in mind as she penned the lyrics. "You can't have a casual relationship with fear. You have to be sassy with it," she explains. "You can insert any word there: *shame, guilt, worry, anger, whatever* it is. None of those things have a place in our lives unless we let them."

From fear to identity, Battistelli reaffirms the truth that who we are is rooted in Jesus. And she's already getting her fans' attention. In fact, female-driven anthem "Royalty" is a track fans have been begging Battistelli to record since she started playing it live more than a year ago. The central message of being heirs of the King strikes a chord. "It's just a very empowering song about walking as sons and daughters of the Lord," she says. "That makes us royalty, but we don't live that way most of the time, and we should!"

Meanwhile, the joyful "The Very Best" drives a stake in the ground, declaring that we are worth God's very best. *Own It* also takes its title from one of the song's lyrics. "I want my daughter to sing this over her life," Battistelli says of the bright track.

Then there's the dramatic, theatrical "You Belong," one of the easiest songs on the album to write—perhaps because the content resonated so deeply with the singer herself.

"For someone who's in the spotlight, people assume *Well, surely she feels like she has all the friends and everyone loves her and everything's great,*" Battistelli says of people's perceived perception of her. "I have always felt in my life like I didn't really belong. When we wrote this song, I was entering a season with this community of women, and it's the sweetest sense of friendship and belonging that I've ever experienced, and it's been really healing and really beautiful. It was like the Lord really gave me that word—*belong.*"

From start to finish, *Own It* is vibrant proof that Battistelli is confident in who she belongs to and more comfortable than ever before in the labels she wears: wife, mother, daughter, friend, singer, songwriter, and, most importantly, child of God.

"I'm starting to come to terms with the fact that this season is not going to last forever, but that's okay," she reveals. "I used to really have a hard time with that. I'd just try to hold on to everything, because everything was always changing in our lives. God has helped me to release control a little bit."

Loosening her grip and stepping out into a fresh season, Battistelli will head back out on the road in support of *Own It*. But for the first time in almost a decade, she'll be touring without her kids in tow, giving her a unique experience. "I've always brought my family on tour, so this is going to be new, but I *am* excited to sleep!" she exclaims. Armed with new music, she hopes these songs tell a universal story that will translate to listeners regardless of their beliefs.

"I've always loved when my music has had the opportunity to go beyond the walls of the church and reach people," she says. "To think that someone could discover these songs and come to know the Lord? I couldn't ask for anything more."

As for the singer herself, for the first time Battistelli finally feels like she belongs; and she wants her fans to experience a similar sense of belonging, too. Her advice? No matter your age, season of life, social status, talents, calling or opportunities, know your worth and own it.

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