

## Hawk Nelson *Made*

Some musicians who have played together for nearly a decade, released five albums and played countless shows on countless tours, could turn to album six and toss it together in their sleep. They are pros. They've been doing this a long time; autopilot would actually produce some pretty good music.

But what if those musicians who had written and played together for years didn't switch to autopilot and, instead, became more intentional in their music than ever before? The result would be a set of songs that sound, lyrically and musically, like each note and word were precisely paired. The result would be Hawk Nelson's sixth studio album *Made*, releasing April 2013.

In many ways, *Made* reflects the journey Hawk Nelson has been on since *Crazy Love* released in 2011. Since then, the band has found a new label home with Fair Trade Services, longtime guitarist for Hawk Nelson, Jonathan Steingard, has transitioned into the role of frontman after Jason Dunn departed to begin his solo career, and the band of four is now a trio of him, Daniel Biro (bass), and Justin Benner (drums). Many changes. Even more unknowns. But one thing is for certain: Something has clicked, and this album is the proof.

Biro, who founded the band ten years ago, has grown with Hawk Nelson this last decade and believes all of the change has resulted in an honest and God-breathed product. "This time around," says Biro, "we're going through all of this emotional change, physical change, and God breathed some new songs that channeled all those feelings and doubts and emotions into these lyrics."

As much change as Hawk Nelson has undergone in the last year, new lead singer Jonathan Steingard explains the DNA of the band is still the same. "We're still that high energy band that a church or youth group would book if they want to have a fun youth night," says Steingard. We want to take what we've been and not leave it behind, but grow it a little bit and hopefully be a lot more intentional about what we're saying."

This intentionality shines through the two central songs on the album: "Words" and "Made." Steingard wrote "Words" with Matt Hammitt (Sanctus Real) and Seth Mosley, the producer on the album. The song, and first single, is product of a conversation Steingard had with Hamitt and Mosley. "We were talking about how easy it is to forget how impacting we can be in the lives of the people around us just with our words," says Steingard. As the lyrics explain, *Words can build you up; words can break you down. / Start a fire in your heart or put it out.*

“Words,” which features vocals by Bart Millard (MercyMe), is a response to “Made”—a building song, layered with fast-tempo strings, that speaks boldly to the listener during the chorus: *You’re beautiful, wonderful, perfectly made*. “The idea behind that song,” says Steingard, “is that when something is made instead of just happening, everything about it is on purpose and intentional. If we didn’t just happen, if we were created by someone who loves us and cares about us and has a purpose for our lives, then when we look in the mirror, we should be satisfied with what we see.”

So “Made” tells us we are on purpose, and “Words” encourages us to live life purposefully.

The lyrical intentionality runs throughout the album but it does not, of course, replace that unique, I-just-can’t-sit-still-right-now, fun, contagious, signature sound of Hawk Nelson. Songs like “Elevator” and fast and loud “Anyone But You” will leave the listener with a strong takeaway message while they dance along and jump up and down, as Hawk Nelson fans do.

Hawk Nelson will also be intentional with the philanthropy aspect of their spring tour for *Made*. They have partnered with Food for the Hungry to support one, specific city that is in need. Many bands go on tour these days and raise sponsorships for kids through various non-profit organizations, but by focusing on one place, Hawk Nelson will bring sponsorship to a tangible level. “It doesn’t seem as grandiose as ‘We need to get *all* these kids sponsored,’” says Justin Benner. Their goal is to raise enough sponsorships for one village to be self-sustaining by the end of the tour. “Then,” says Benner, “you could say ‘I contributed to that—that specific thing.’”

Fan involvement is Hawk Nelson’s specialty. Further proof of this is in how they raised funds for *Made*. It was a Kickstarter project—an online fundraising tool now often used for producing new records. Biro believes the Kickstarter success proves the power of the relationships this band has built with the industry and with fans over the years. And despite the new look of Hawk Nelson, he says, “Real relationships span the test of time, and those relationships have stayed in tact and those people have showed their support.”

No doubt Hawk Nelson has loyal fans. They are known for a rigorous tour schedule, working on albums while on the road and playing in front of people as much as possible. Hawk Nelson does well reaching the younger demographic that can be so difficult to get through to, but now, as their music is maturing, they hope to broaden their reach. With more mature album themes like living purposefully and more challenging lyrics, they surely will.

With the success of *Crazy Love*, which was nominated for numerous GMA awards, you would think these three are feeling the industry pressure with *Made*. But the band members are confident in this new phase. “We just all believe in it,” says Benner.

Biro, agrees and sees the challenges as the exact preparation the band needed. “When you’re in those valleys, those are the times you grow,” he says. “I’m really proud of the guys for sticking around because it is a brand new thing. It’s a new identity, and I’m excited about it.”

Steingard has felt peaceful about the transition before the transition even officially happened. In spring 2012, he was in a hotel room in Australia on tour when he played for Biro what is now the upbeat, lead-in track on *Made* called “What I’m Looking for.” The chorus chants *What I’m looking is for is more than a feeling / What I’m looking for is something bigger than me.*

It’s that belief in something bigger that Steingard clings to. “I don’t feel pressure,” he says, “because from the get-go, this has felt like something God’s been sorting out for a while. It feels like there’s something going on that’s bigger than any of us.” With this type of focus on the bigger picture, anything is possible for the new Hawk Nelson.