

# PARADISE SKY

# Randy Stonehill

He's come a long way since that day in Norman's kitchen.

Introduced to the Lord while at the home of friend and mentor Larry Norman, **Paradise Sky** finds the legendary singer-songwriter Randy Stonehill revisiting and re-recording selections from his early days that brought this pioneer of the Jesus Movement era - and beyond - to prominence.

"**Paradise Sky** is the album that best defines my past," states Stonehill. *"It's a full blown studio recording of those songs that started my career and became a musical backdrop for the Jesus Movement of the '70s."*

Filled with 11 songs from four different albums (**Born Twice**, **Welcome to Paradise**, **The Sky is Falling**, and **Equator**), **Paradise Sky** is a journey back to an earlier - some may say a more innocent - era in the history of Christian music. Like a classic novel that's been re-written with modern English diction, Stonehill has maintained the charm of the original recordings while bringing his work into the 21st century.

*"Co-producer Mike Pachelli and I realized we could strengthen the songs sonically with the new technology at our disposal,"* states Stonehill. *"You can't recapture your youth, but you can bring an authority to the performances that comes only through walking life's road by faith for this many years."*

And a long road it has been, filled with dips and detours as well as smooth, open freeways. Starting with his first record in 1971 on a budget of \$800, followed by a long string of influential and historically significant albums in the ensuing 30+ years, Stonehill exemplifies the meaning of the word longevity.

*"There was an almost spooky experience when I sat down to play the acoustic guitar part for 'Keep Me Runnin',"* remembers Stonehill. *"It was like I stood outside the moment for a little while and I realized that here I was, 32 years later, playing the same part on the same old Martin guitar that Larry Norman had given to me back in 1974... it sort of choked me up."*

**Paradise Sky** has a rather unique beginning that directly ties in to Stonehill's musical roots: the album was originally created for the upcoming film **Fallen Angel**, a documentary about the life of Larry Norman.

*"Paradise Sky was an opportunity that came to me,"* says Stonehill. *"The film's producer, David Di Sabatino, was putting together a movie about the early days of this musical/spiritual movement that actually focused thru the lens, if you will, on my relationship with Larry Norman in a creative, spiritual and personal sense,"* recalls Stonehill. *"Di Sabatino ran into complications in securing the rights to use the original recordings so he asked me if I would re-record 11 songs from that era."*

Stonehill seized this unique opportunity to revisit his own music, bringing to the table three decades of musical experience - and a fresh perspective as well.

*"The songs on Paradise Sky are like mile markers of my spiritual journey,"* says Stonehill. *"The music is both personal and universal, because everybody is in the same basic boat, wrestling with their humanity, trying to make sense of a fallen world and hungering for hope,"* Stonehill asserts. *"I had written these songs during a special season of life when God was galvanizing my spiritual vision."*

That 'special season' was affirmed by Larry Norman, who told Stonehill as he was creating songs for **Welcome to Paradise** (released in 1976), "write as much as you can during this season of life because you're at a place in your spiritual journey where you will never be again."

Stonehill explains, *“It was like he knew God was doing something in my growth as a Christian, and deepening my roots for the long run. I was capturing the essence of that in these songs.”*

One of those songs is *“King of Hearts,”* which Stonehill found exciting yet surprisingly emotional as he recorded the vocals for ***Paradise Sky***. *“It really did take me back to that early season of my faith when I was writing songs about the bigger picture of life. That song had started out as a love song for a young lady that I was getting pretty serious about at the time,”* remembers Stonehill.

*“But I felt the Lord guiding my pen in another direction; it was almost as if He was saying ‘Look - if you want to write a real love song, then why don't you put the horse in front of the cart and write about the Author of love?’”*

*“King of Hearts”* went on to be one of the landmark songs that helped define the early Christian music genre, along with *“Keep Me Runnin’”* from the same album, ***Welcome to Paradise***.

*“‘Keep Me Runnin’” is a person favorite for me,”* comments Stonehill. *“Mike Pachelli and I had so much fun making that thing rock! Mike is a great engineer; he has an intense work ethic that borders on obsessive. From his brilliant electric guitar work to my signature acoustic guitar work along with doing these harmonies, you can hear the ghost of the original recordings from the '70s. You can definitely hear the Eagles influence on that song. As a matter of fact, when I wrote it in my little apartment in North Hollywood back in 1974, I remember consciously thinking ‘if Glenn Fry and Don Henley were Christians, maybe they would write a song like this.’ So it was kind of a tip of my hat to those guys, stylistically. And I suspect that they would have liked it, actually,”* recalls Stonehill.

The joy in journeying to the past while trekking in the present is apparent in *“Good News,”* a blistering, rollicking Gospel song at its core. *“It sounds very traditional on one level, but on another level I was so energized and had so much fun doing the vocals that you actually can hear me laughing at one point in the performance!”* chuckles Stonehill. *“This song captures some musical Gospel roots and it captures my joy as a man who has seen God's grace at work in his life over three decades.”*

The past 30 years have seen a variety of producers, different musical styles and directions for Stonehill, but at the very beginning of Stonehill's illustrious career, it was Larry Norman who helped lay the foundation of faith. Though he never had the chance to listen to ***Paradise Sky*** this side of heaven, Stonehill believes that *“knowing God is God, somehow Larry is able to hear the songs and he's probably laughing in heaven! He'd be smiling; he'd be happy hearing these recordings,”* reflects Stonehill. *“Larry would say ‘OK - there's the essence of the original stuff but it's been strengthened and refined... this kid I mentored all those years ago has taken his faith seriously and has learned his craft well.’”*