

# FRANCESCA BATTISTELLI

## MY PAPER HEART

“We must be willing to let go of the life we have planned, so as to have the life that is waiting for us.”—E.M. Forester

So, what do you want to be when you grow up?

It’s a question that takes many people years and years of trial and error and self-discovery to figure out. But for singer/songwriter Francesca Battistelli, her mind was made up when she was only six years old. After seeing “The Secret Garden” on Broadway with her parents, the decision was ultimately a no-brainer. “There was just something about live theater—especially musical theater—that has always resonated with me,” Francesca says. “So I thought that was it. I was going to be Mary Lennox in ‘The Secret Garden.’”

Of course for anyone who knew her family, Francesca’s passion for life on the stage wasn’t all that surprising, given her mom and dad’s extensive theater background. In fact, they met when her dad was the assistant conductor for the national tour of “The King and I,” while her mom played Anna, the show’s female lead opposite Yul Brynner.

Like any girl with dreams of grandeur, Francesca knew carving out her own path in the ultra-competitive arts world wasn’t going to be easy. But with her Broadway aspirations in the back of her mind and an insatiable work ethic, she stayed focused. Instead of signing up for the typical extracurriculars like cheerleading or sports, Francesca’s life revolved around dance classes and musical theater training.

And when Francesca was 15, she put her skills to good use in an all-girl mainstream pop group in Orlando, an experience that helped pave the way for what she does today. “We traveled all over and performed at Hard Rock Live and House of Blues a couple of times,” Francesca recalls. “It was good for what it was because it tied together two things I loved: singing and dancing.”

But when the gig eventually ended, Francesca says she was thankful for an opportunity to clear her head. “Not long after, I recharged my batteries by going to this youth ministry that I absolutely loved,” Francesca shares. “It was there where the Lord really captured my heart for Christian music. I started playing guitar and really longed to bring something authentic to the scene that even non-Christians could listen to.”

Armed with her passion for writing and hope for a hurting world, Francesca put pen to paper and crafted heartfelt, personal reflections on life and faith for what’s now her major-label debut, *My Paper Heart*. Inspired by everyone from the jazz greats her dad introduced her to as a kid, to contemporaries like John Mayer, Sara Bareilles and Nichole Nordeman, Francesca set out to write “soulful pop music that someone pops in the morning and says, ‘Now I can start my day, I feel encouraged.’”

One of the first tracks Francesca wrote upon moving to Nashville, her first single “I’m Letting Go,” not only highlights Francesca’s expressive vocals but her overarching desire to encourage her peers not to settle for anything less than what God has for them.

“I’d just moved to Nashville, and I was sort of letting go of everything that someone can at 22 years old,” Francesca shares. “And it’s far better and different in more ways than I could’ve expected. There’s a line in the song that says ‘I feel like I’m falling/And that’s what it’s like to

believe.' Walking in faith is like free-falling, yet that's the best place to be. But so many of us are afraid to do that."

On the title track, Francesca tackles another universal fear—the fragility of the human heart. "This has been the hardest, scariest, most rewarding year of my life. I have known sorrow, and I have known joy," she shares. "God has spoken quietly the words of His heart, and He has shown me colors in the grayest hues of winter. He has sung songs over me in solitude, and He has never let go of my fragile, paper heart. He knows every corner of it—the tattered, torn, and untouched places. He knows the songs that move it, the words that pierce it, and the people He uses to change it. I am forever safe in His hands."

And while pouring out your heart doesn't always come easy for some, the songwriting process has been both cathartic and fun for Francesca. Describing it as "the most fun she's ever had professionally," Francesca's enthusiasm can't help but find its way into her music. In fact, whether she's talking about the spirited, funk-laden title track or the buoyant, accept-yourself-as-you-are anthem "Free to Be Me," Francesca bookends her commentary with "I really love this song. It's so much fun to sing." And that pervasive joy, along with Francesca's adventurous musicianship and relatable songwriting make *My Paper Heart* an impressive debut.

But even more important to Francesca than offering up a collection of catchy songs for the masses is speaking a message of truth and purpose.

"Ultimately, I want to be an encouragement as an artist and a fellow believer," Francesca says. "The Lord has continually called me to do things that are outside my comfort zone, whether it was accompanying myself on guitar for the first time in front of seasoned players or packing up and moving to Nashville last year knowing hardly anybody. Still, He's never left me, and He constantly shows me that it's worth it. I have parents who pray and encourage me to be bold and to take bold steps for Christ. I don't think that's common enough in the Christian culture. We have these big dreams, but many aren't willing to take the steps to go after them. Yet this is the moment. We're not promised tomorrow. So today's the day."