

GWYN JAY ALLEN

You might have seen him opening up for Kirk Franklin earlier in the year in London. You might be lucky enough to have already heard his incredible debut album or picked up his mainstream single 'I Luv You Babe'. If you're really hip to his music you might already know he was a featured vocalist with Basement Jaxx. If you haven't wised up to all of that, don't worry! Here's your chance to get in the picture.

It's been quite a ride for Gwyn Jay Allen. He sums it up very briefly and simply by saying, "I was held hostage in my home country Sierra Leone. Interrogated with a gun in the bush. Had malaria on arrival in UK and nearly died." Aply he's chosen to record a stripped-down version of the old spiritual 'Nobody Knows The Trouble I've Seen', and the song seems to sum up so much.

It was in 1983 that Gwyn became a Christian. He remembers: "I was running to get some Kentucky - and in mid flight I was stopped by Bill Thomson, a middle aged guy who took less than five minutes to prove to me I wasn't a Christian. I grew up in a nominal Christian Methodist home with God-fearing, caring parents. But the conviction I felt that night changed my life. I promised to join him in church that week. The church was charismatic, simple and friendly. That Sunday, I decided to stay and start my walk with Jesus."

He continues: "It reminds me of the time I was searching and felt the world had nothing to offer, and was misguided and heading for destruction. Full of sex, drunkenness, drugs, violence and no morality. Thinking that no body cared for anyone but themselves. Did not want to live in it. I guess a lot of people feel this from time to time and do not know where to turn or what to do. When you think of,

a life without Jesus is doomed and grey. I am just glad that I have found the answer. He satisfies me to the bone. To the depth of my soul."

A record producer introduced him to Basement Jaxx, who needed lead vocals for a single on their Atlantic Jaxx label. He recalls: "I subsequently recorded several successful singles for them. I recorded on their debut album 'Remedy'. I did several local gigs with them, but never toured. Whilst we were recording 'Remedy', I played them a song I had written to my wife back in 1987, called "I Luv U Babe". They loved it. It was recorded and released on Atlantic Jaxx in February 2001, and got to about Number 40 in the charts."

Now he has an independently released debut album, 'The Land of Milk and Money', which was birthed in a prophetic word spoken over him by Charles and Miriam da Costa. Basically, God told Gwyn that he wanted him to record an album. He remembers: "I had written many songs and led worship for a long time, and always had the ambition to do an album. The three main problems where: choosing what type of album to do, having so many influences - from Jazz to R&B, Latin to African, Gospel to Soul - and finding the time and the money to do it.

"Lying on the beach in Italy, God spoke clearly to me, and I wrote down a promise to give him my first fruits and do an album that would glorify him, and also not to put a commercial value on it. So I decided to do everything that was me in this album, and not to worry about what the market wanted."

The final encouragement to record came with the opportunity to support Kirk Franklin at the Albert Hall. Incredibly, he hurried the recording to have something to share with the audience after he'd performed. It was all a rush, he explains. "We had three rehearsals to arrange the songs and one for the actual album. We also had a month to do the photography,

design it, record, mix, master and get it to the manufactures in order to make it in time for the 31st of March. It took approximately seven hours to record seven of the nine songs."

The album doesn't feel rushed. It's a brilliant mix of all of Gwyn's influences, from the fine title cut to the final song, 'Na So Dem Say', recorded in his native Krio language. Another highlight is the spontaneous 'Crying Out' - which, Gwyn explains, is all about his son Sean. "He had a serious medical problem that was too much for me to deal with, and one Sunday whilst leading worship, I broke out and unexpectedly cried my eyes out, and sang those words to God in desperation for him to heal my son. He's done just that!"

Memories of recording the album come flooding back to Gwyn: "Writing down the words to 'Crying Out' in the vocal booth five minutes before recording it, and then recording it in one take. Having an overwhelming feeling that God was with us and in us all the way from start to finish. Having no sleep for 42 hours. Being handed the final studio mix!"

It's been quite a ride, but Gwyn Jay Allen's debut album proves he is a man with a testimony of God moving in his past, and a future that beckons brightly.

Mike Rimmer