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CANDICE CASAGRANDE - VULNERABLE, INTELLIGENT, AND FRESH

Candice Casagrande's stage presence is so vulnerable that sometimes you forget how serious some of her songs are.

The Lismore based singer moves onto the stage clutching a guitar and she's straight into *Make It A Good 1* - the song that last month gained her international recognition in the prestigious Unisong international songwriting contest.

The spotlight highlights her face as her fingers stroke the guitar strings.

Immediately, the combination of the warm voice and the self effacing personality makes sense.

Casagrande's world and the coastal café scene are like honey and a bee; permeating the intimate space from her corner while delicately observing the coming and goings of people, some smiling, some impassive.

She keeps a diary, of course, and moons over Pete Murray records.

Her music is set apart by an acoustic driven pop/rock sound, with lyrics that speak about what she calls the "real" and "raw" elements of life.

They're not so much about her as they are about the people around her, and how someone might feel.

But every now and then something autobiographical chimes in.

Just A Mask - her new radio song from her debut CD *New Day* - is about a young person going to all extremes to fit in.

Candice says she wrote *Just A Mask* because she knows that she's not the only one who has worn one.

"For years in high school I got into all kinds of dangerous situations just to be friends with certain people and gain their respect," Candice admits.

"I was a different person at home, completely different at school and at parties, and a whole other person at church.

"I don't want others to waste time and energy being fake like I did," she confides.

So what's her appeal? It's the care, the intelligence, the freshness, and the subtlety of her approach when all around others bluster and scream their wares down your throat.

She's real.

UNITE 09

American songwriter and worship leader Dan McCollum is the keynote speaker at this year's Unite 09 creative arts conference.

Unite is an annual conference organised by four Melbourne churches - Crossway Baptist, C3 Whitehorse, Gateway and Careforce.

The two day conference aims to inspire the city's worship leaders, singers, instrumentalists, songwriters, dance, drama and media teams. But it's open to people from all over Australia and beyond.

Unite will be held at Crossway Baptist Burwood East May 1 and 2.

More details at cccw.org.au/unite