

Evolution Of Omar, The Man (Interview)



“I need to make music that Iâ€™m really proud of because at the end of the day thatâ€™s all I have left”

[Seven](#) years ago Omar Lye-Fook released *Sing*, the sixth album in his 20-year plus journey as the UKâ€™s most resolute and resilient lone soul man. During his recording hiatus he toured globally, did a one-man play, accepted the MBE Award and became a father to twin girls. *The Man* is a sonic record of all those experiences crystallized into his signature layering of horns, synthesizers, vocals and rhythm. The video for “The Man” reflects those life changes with his family as the supporting cast in the summery visuals. His blending of old soul with contemporary forms earned him the British neo-soul forefather moniker long ago but titles are not as important to him as the connection he has made with fans globally despite being disconnected from the music industry establishment. In this interview he talks about the road to *The Man* and what comes after in his endless expedition of sound.

What have you been up to since we last heard from you? What has life been like offstage?

I moved to Brighton I had been living in London where the studio is at so I go back and forth. I was touring I was in Australia, Jakarta I was just travelling the world. Itâ€™s been a minute since Iâ€™ve been in the US so hopefully I will be out there in August or September.

What else have you been up to?

Iâ€™m also acting as well my own one-man play it was written

for me by a guy named Jay Walker. It's like a 50-minute monologue with my songs like 6 or 7 of my songs. I've been touring the UK with it and when I get to the US I can do it there. It's called *Love Song*.

Who's The Man?

I am! *laughs* It's basically when I put all the album tracks together I kind of picked the best title from the best track and "The Man" seemed to be the one.

Does the video reflect the story of the song?

When I wrote the lyrics I wasn't actually thinking of my family it's just when the treatment came in for the video it was kind of what I was thinking about. I was thinking one way before the girls were born but once they were born then everything changed.

[youtube]akZ0y9t6GZQ[/youtube]

Yes I saw that you had twins in 2008?

2007.

How do you like being a dad now?

It's cool I wouldn't change it for the world. They're my heart and soul. It's that sense of purpose. It's a track on the album I wrote called "Ordinary Day" it's dedicated to them and the mother.

What would you say is the biggest difference in you now that you've become a Dad?

I love them so much I find myself being a bit more matter of fact boxing now because it's two girls when they become teenagers I don't want anybody knocking on the door.

How would you compare *The Man* to *Sing*?

Everything is an evolution for me Iâ€™m always writing music. Itâ€™s more organic thereâ€™s a lot of live instrumentation; brass, horns, everything seems to be more of a live feel but itâ€™s still Omar.

How did you end up working with Caron Wheeler this time?

Sheâ€™s on a track called â€œTreat Youâ€ a song that you know the beginning of â€œSing?â€ Well basically someone said that they wished it was longer so I just sat down and did it. I asked a few other singers, I wonâ€™t name them if they could do the track and things just didnâ€™t quite work out. Then I went to a Soul II Soul reunion gig in South Brixton and she was there. I asked her to do it and she said yeah I sent her the track and she sent it back to me like a week later with the vocals such a beautiful thing. We worked together years ago like 1980 or 1985 or something because my dad knows her so it just kind of makes sense sheâ€™s on the track.

I met Meshell Ndegeocello once and asked her about you and she said you all did something in the studio once is that true?

Yes but the final version I didnâ€™t like what I did. But yes we tried to do some stuff together. I heard she was in town the other day and I missed her.

Have you ever thought of working with folks from that time period like Loose Ends?

I talk to Carl McIntosh all the time. Iâ€™m talking to a bunch of us Old School singers all the time me, Carl McIntosh, Junior Giscombe and Jazzie B we all kind of end up in the same club. Weâ€™re going to do something together we just have to all get in the same room sometime.

What do you like the most about *The Man*?

Itâ€™s the best stuff Iâ€™ve done to date you put it on from start to finish youâ€™re not going to stop it. Every album

that Iâ€™ve made has been a mark-up for me in terms of my life and the journey. Iâ€™m not saying the girlsâ€™ spark has kind of boosted my inspiration but there is definitely something going on with my writing. Because before you have kids youâ€™re not sure how much itâ€™s going to change your life but Iâ€™ve been inspired to pay the bills and feed their faces.



How did it feel to get the MBE and to have it presented to you by Prince Charles who is a fan?

Itâ€™s kind of mind boggling because I donâ€™t get any mainstream attention from the awards people in any fashion. So when I was told I was going to be nominated I didnâ€™t really expect anything from that. A nomination is a nomination so when I got the letter it kind of took my breath away.

You have always stayed true to your musical vision seemingly without much concern for mainstream recognition but is that something that you ever think about?

No, not at all because my stuff comes from the heart. When Iâ€™m in the studio and I come-up with a bassline, the chords, the melody the arrangements thatâ€™s all coming from inside me itâ€™s not like â€˜This is the kind of music thatâ€™s being played now let me try to make something like that.â€™ Itâ€™s never come from that spot I might have tried that when I was younger. I need to make music that Iâ€™m really proud of because at the end of the day thatâ€™s all I have left. Iâ€™ve had record deals and they were trying to persuade me to do different things. Iâ€™ve got to make stuff Iâ€™m proud of and I think I have a fat catalog now.

Who do you want to work with next?

Iâ€™ve put it out there Iâ€™d love to work with Bill Withers or Bobby Womack. The track â€œThe Manâ€ is inspired by his

song "A Woman's Gotta Have It." Those are idols of mine and I've worked with Leon Ware.

How do you feel about the title Father of British Neo-Soul?

You know people give me lots of different titles it's flattering to say the least. I'm just happy to be in the industry doing what I love to do and that people get inspired by it it's all good.

What's going on in the soul scene in the UK right now? And who are you listening to from the US?

There's Kevin Mark Trail he's coming out with some nice stuff. Sharlene Hector a young singer called Ego Ella Mae they're doing their thing. My sister is doing her thing Samia Lye-Fook. I like Janelle Monae I think she's coming with something different.

Have you thought about re-releasing any of your catalog?

You know if it was up to me I would have them re-released but it's just those that I have with those labels like BMG This Is Not A Love Song. They decided to discontinue the album but now If it was up to me I would love to have them re-released absolutely. We are trying to get them on the shelf again. That's the beauty of the internet I reach the fans directly. Before you had to go through the labels and things like that where now people can find music directly which is fantastic for people that are independent of the major labels. It's worldwide as well I see that I'm getting love from South Africa, Brazil, Argentina, places I haven't really been. I've been to South Africa. I really want to get back to South America as well.

[The Man](#) will be released domestically on June 18th

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