

# Danielia Cotton's Real Book (Interview)



Danielia Cotton's smoldering semi-rasped vocals have been inevitably compared to Etta James and Tina Turner. But those comparisons only tell half the story of the rocker from New Jersey whose grasp of the guitar puts her in a rare lineage of women like Rosetta Tharpe, Bonnie Raitt, Melissa Etheridge, Tracy Chapman and most recently Valerie June. Cotton's raw honesty meets at the intersection of soul and rock and tells the story of a multi-ethnic Black woman claiming her space in a genre white washed by industry politics. Growing up in a musical family as one of a few African-Americans in a small town influenced her candor about identity and drove the need to express those frustrations in her art. As a powerful performer and songwriter she has received acclaim from the mainstream press and blogosphere for her stage shows and made songs like "Strange Fruit" her own. She is currently preparing for the release of her 4th studio album, *The Real Book*, which is a selection of cover songs she possesses with the intimacies of her inner world. Cotton recently spoke with *Kickmag* about *The Real Book*, growing up in Hopewell, New Jersey and the plight of being a Black woman rocker in a not so post-racial America.

**You have a bluesy rock sound how did you come to that?**

My father played guitar and he gave one to me and it really stopped me from being a depressed child. Blues is the base of a lot of music, for rock, country and R&B. I think everybody

pulls from that storytelling thing that I think every genre has some. And growing up in a small white town those kids were not listening to Stevie Wonder. There probably were some but not the ones I was hanging out with. My older brother was very much into rock, he would play like Todd Rundgren, Yes and Zeppelin. Our rooms were next door to each other and I could hear everything.

**You call your new album of covers, *The Real Book*, is that a take on the Fake Book that jazz musicians use to learn jazz?**

Yes it is! Weâ€™re doing covers that we chose very carefully because I would only chose stories that I could live in it was a process just to pick the right tunes. Kevin came up with that because we really did pick them and make them our own like some of the guys never heard the cover we did of Bruno Marsâ€™ â€œGorilla.â€ A lot of my guys donâ€™t listen to the radio and they thought the song was mine and I was like no, itâ€™s a cover. And it has the cover design, which is really beautiful done by David Calderley who did the famous Moby album with the big A thing on it. It almost looks like a jazz cover album the cover has the feel of an old jazz album. Itâ€™s a nice deviation from what I was doing itâ€™s a very adult album for me.

**Iâ€™ve looked at your tracklisting for *The Real Book* and you did listen to Stevie Wonder after all.**

My mom had *Songs In The Key Of Life* in her house and his rendition at Michael Jacksonâ€™s funeral is like weâ€™re all leaving. I was little scared of that one but you know but you gotta go for it sometimes.

[youtube id="FzSoNK24Pgw"]

**What about Citizen Copeâ€™s â€œSideways?â€**

The whole idea of lamenting over someone to the point that you just donâ€™t want to feel what you feel that sentiment just

spoke to me. Iâ€™m a Libra and Iâ€™m like a heavyhearted lover and whenever something ends with me itâ€™s always dramatic.

### **Who are the guitar players you have looked up to?**

As a female, Bonnie Raitt if I could play like that I would just be done. The way she plays the slide is the way that I would like to. As far as guitarists, Jimmy Page is ridiculous. Modern day I like Jack White, even AC/DC, Angus is crazy and then heâ€™s jumping around laying on the floor. There is beautiful guitar work on The Fuse album I never thought about a blues guitarist but I was out with Robert Cray for a number of dates and also Buddy Guy and they were both extraordinary. And I did a

### **Whatâ€™s it been like being a Black woman rocker? What are some of the challenges that have come with that?**

Record companies just never knew what to do, they were just like this doesnâ€™t work and the only person they consider like a Black rocker is Tina Turner and they were like that was a long time ago. Itâ€™s like nobodyâ€™s broken through since then and they just donâ€™t want to try itâ€™s just too difficult. And Iâ€™m Black and half-Latino which even makes them more confused and if I really spelled it out for them that my mom is Black, white and American Indian and my dad is Puerto-Rican and Spanish I think they would just walk away. But thatâ€™s America right now, thatâ€™s what it is. And I think too, that some of my albums have been eclectic but rock is just rock and whatever song you do thatâ€™s my opinion and my definition of it. Itâ€™s really difficult even though we were at the forefront of that genre and I dare some of the people who say things to come to my concert and see my audience because they get it. Itâ€™s not something that Iâ€™m putting on to be different and step to the left itâ€™s my life, I grew-up the way that I did and itâ€™s made me who I am. My character in those formative years thatâ€™s where I was so itâ€™s difficult. I just do it and hope that people will

get it.



**Is there any one song from *The Real Book* collection that has the most personal meaning for you?**

I like the Bill Withers song and I said to the producer as we were recording it he says "I hope she'll be happier with him" and I said "Hope you'll be happier with him." That really spoke to me, and the Stevie Wonder song is for me personally because like "They won't go when I go, the greed of man will be far away from me, my soul will be free" it's like you know what? You can step on me, run me over but I'm still standing and I'll be here and they won't go when I go I'm me and I'm holding on to the truest part of myself.

**Who do you want to work with?**

Prince. I actually like Jack White I think he's pretty creative and I think actually when I realized that Jimmy Page had produced a lot of Zeppelin stuff I would love to be produced by him. I'm sure he's still great if not greater. Bonnie Raitt. Right now when I run, I run everyday I listen to there's this Stevie Wonder song called "Hold On To Your Dreams" and it's so uplifting and right now my life it makes you run faster. It's a beautiful song, so uplifting. I like David Ryan Harris I would love to work with him, I listen to "Got Your Back" all the time. A lot of people, I like Ben Harper.

**When does *The Real Book* officially come out?**

We will drop the album officially on October 21 and we will do a soft release on August 19 to sort of premiere the music.

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