

# Catching Up With Hil St. Soul (Interview)



Hilary Mwelwa's voice sounds like an old friend as it feels familiar, trustworthy and warm. As Hil St. Soul she has spent the past two decades making music inspired by love and life with respect to the traditions of R&B and her own creative affinities. Last year she surprised fans with the elevating cheer of "One Life." The song came out at the perfect time as the world had just gone into lockdown because of coronavirus. The call for a good time and weekend getaway was ideal for a safe party at home and a reminder that life is not over. Mwelwa started this year with an earthy interpretation of the Ohio Players' "Heaven Must Be Like This." She has been working on her next album and the new cover is on the way to that destination. I spoke with Mwelwa by phone and she shared bits of her COVID-19 life. In the following interview she revealed the sonic scope of her next project, listening choices and why she misses the mangos grown in her native Zambia.

***"I love music I live it and breathe it so for me music is in my life every day"***

**Last year you reemerged with the single "One Life" how did that song bring you back onto the scene?**

I know to the public it seems that I'm not around but believe it or not I have been making music. It's just in various different projects I obviously would have loved for it to have a wider audience but I've been grinding in the background. But it just happens with "One Life" I collaborated with a producer called Reggie Myrix I met him in 2014. Noel Gourdin was releasing a single over here called

“No Worries” and they were looking for a vocalist so one of my guys who does all the promos for a lot of artists contacted me and said “they are looking for a British artist would you be interested. So I heard the song and loved it so that’s how I got introduced to Reggie.

We just kept in touch so a few years back I was in the US doing a mini-tour in 2018 so I hooked up with Reggie I was actually staying in Philly he’s from New Jersey so he came down we hooked up and he spoke about doing a project together. When I got back to the UK he sent me a bunch of tracks and the backing track for “One Life” just immediately stood out for me I just gravitated towards that and put pen to paper and that was for his project so he was kind of like promoting it over here in the UK and then it found its way over to the US and then Shanachie got a hold of it. So it’s been like an organic process I wasn’t expecting anything to happen with the song but thankfully people latched on to it.

**It’s done well on the Sirius XM Heart & Soul chart.Â**

Yes, you never really know what’s gonna happen to a song until you put it out into the universe. I think people like this vibe because it has a very uplifting message with everything that’s going on in the world right now I think we can all use that distraction.

**What drew you to the Ohio Player’s “Heaven Must Be Like This?”**

I’m always recording covers but I’m always weary about doing covers just because you never know if you’re doing the right thing a lot of people tend to like the original versions. Eyebrows always raise when you do a cover. Randall said to me what do you think about doing this I was like let me just kind of vibe with it see how I get on with it because for me to cover a song I need to really connect with it and just feel like I’m going to bring something new or at least

be able to put my stamp on it so when I heard the song I thought Iâ€™m obviously familiar with it but when you listen again you start to hear things you didnâ€™t before and I just thought what a beautiful composition I loved the overall vibe of it I just felt like it was a song I could definitely do something with I basically got a track from Prince Damon who is the producer when I heard that I really liked what he had done with it obviously the original is very laid back and chilled so I didnâ€™t really want to duplicate whatâ€™s been done already and I just kind of wanted to bring a fresh twist to it when I heard what he had done so I put my vocals on and it just worked I really didnâ€™t know how it was going to sound until I actually started recording it.

Itâ€™s almost like youâ€™re doing a painting and youâ€™re just kind of putting all the layers It just all came together nicely and I was happy with how it came out. Iâ€™m just glad that everybody feels the same way because the reaction Iâ€™ve had so far has really been amazing so Iâ€™m glad that people are digging it. As an artist, you canâ€™t really ask for more especially when you are doing covers.

**How do you feel about the wave of virtual performances that popped up during the pandemic for obvious reasons? What you do feel about performing a virtual show?**

The times that weâ€™re living in right now itâ€™s very challenging for everybody not just artists. But in terms, as an artist not being able to perform at live venues it is very frustrating so I guess everybodyâ€™s trying different ways to reach their audiences so I think itâ€™s a great thing. I havenâ€™t really done any myself but I think thatâ€™s something I will be doing but Iâ€™ve obviously been working on putting product together and once I put it out and start sharing with everyone I probably will do that. We donâ€™t

really have much of a choice right now but at the same time, it's a beautiful way to share what you're doing with your audience and stay connected with them.

**What kinds of things have you been doing to survive this time? Is there any particular music including your own to offer comfort? How have you been coping?**

I love music I live it and breathe it so for me music is in my life every day. I tend to listen to a lot of the old stuff I love listening to old music. My iTunes selection is quite eclectic so I listen to everything from New Jack Swing to neo-soul to old school, rare groove, you name it hip-hop I've got a mixture so you know. I do definitely listen to a lot of music since we're spending a lot of time indoors I do find that that uplifts me. It's like a distraction really cause sometimes when you kind of watching the news and you see what's going on out there it's quite depressing. I try to exercise to music because I'm not doing so much of that at the moment because we are stuck indoors. So yeah, music is everything to me and it plays a really important part in lifting my spirits and hopefully, it's the same for a lot of people even if they're not into my music it's just a great way to escape reality. I listen to music every day that's a very important part of my life.

**It's been a long while since your *Soul Organic* debut, what have you noticed different about the UK soul scene?**

It's evolved and become a lot more prominent. We've always been kind of known for creativity and our sound being very different from what goes on in the US. You guys do soul and R&B you do it at that level we have always aspired to. I think we've got a different kind of slant and approach to when we're creating music so it has a different style and I have definitely over the years seen the growth and evolution in that sound. To me, I came from in terms of soul music coming from the UK it was like Soul II Soul, Loose Ends and the Young

Disciples but since then youâ€™ve got a whole heap of other artists who are doing their thing and have definitely put the UK on the map. There are a lot of British artists who have and are doing well in the US. Itâ€™s definitely bigger and better.

**Is there anyone in particular that you like thatâ€™s contemporary?**

An artist thatâ€™s really kind of pricked my ears is this young lady called Cleo Soul. I really like her vibe because sheâ€™s really kind of quirky and different so Iâ€™ve been listening to her stuff a lot but then I listen to people like Omar, Donnie, Terri Walker, but I suppose in the most current climate I would say Cleo Soul and I like Mahalia as well. She has a nice vibe to what she does thereâ€™s a lot of great artists out here some of them I havenâ€™t touched upon but there is a lot of good music coming out of the UK.

**Can you describe the sound?**

People say that I have a particular sound but I really just like to touch on all the things that have influenced me. It will be what people are used to hearing in terms of Hil St. Soul but maybe just a little bit of a twist. Like I said Iâ€™ve been dabbling in soulful house so thereâ€™s some of elements of that in the songs, a few acoustic vibes, back in 2018 I went back to Zambia because thatâ€™s where I was born that's where my parents live so I took a year out and I worked with some local musicians so there will be a little bit of my traditional music so Iâ€™m just trying to include all of the things all of the music that has influenced me throughout my life. So there will be a little bit of a Zambian vibe to my music. Thatâ€™s why itâ€™s taking so long because Iâ€™m trying to challenge myself. Iâ€™m busy busy trying to consolidate all of these ideas and just hopefully make a wonderful body of work. So hopefully you guys wonâ€™t have to wait too much longer to hear it.

**Do you go home to Zambia a lot?**

Yes, I do. I did quite regularly until recently. I try to go once a year. I try to go as often as I can. I was supposed to go there in March actually I had my flight booked and everything. I wanted to go in December but they put us I lockdown again so Iâ€™m just kind of waiting for a window to open. Itâ€™s just very scary times because a lot of people have been affected by this virus including myself Iâ€™ve had family members, unfortunately, succumb to it. My parents are not young they are elderly so Iâ€™m quite eager to spend time with them because you just donâ€™t know whatâ€™s around the corner.

**Is there anything about your home that you like better than the UK or vice-versa?**

Yeah, funny enough some people say the weather. The weather is amazing out in Zambia but October November itâ€™s unbearably hot my skinâ€™s so used to the cold now I just find it a bit uncomfortable. That said the weather is beautiful but for me itâ€™s very open in terms of the space thereâ€™s a lot of outdoor space you feel kind of freer. But my favorite thing of all because I am a mango lover Zambian mangos are out of this world. We usually get them in December so thatâ€™s definitely on top of my list. My motherâ€™s got like an orchard of them and we just pick loads of them and I can just eat bucketloads of mangos because when you have the mangos here in the UK thereâ€™s just no flavor whatsoever so you just eat it because youâ€™re craving a mango but itâ€™s just not the same experience. The other thing is when youâ€™re eating mango in the heat itâ€™s a different vibe altogether and you canâ€™t do that in the UK because itâ€™s always cold.

**One of my favorite songs of yours is your duet with Dwele, â€œCome Over.â€ Do you have any plans or dream collaborations?**

As an artist, you do have like a little kind of bucket list of who you would love to work with. You tend to do a lot of these collaborations on the road because this is when you get to meet a lot of these artists. Iâ€™m a huge fan of Stokley from Mint Condition I love his vibe. Thereâ€™s so many people off the top of my head I love Dâ€™Angelo, I love Jill Scott.

### **Plans and parting words?**

Iâ€™ve been busy trying to get an album finished my main goal all this time. Iâ€™ve been releasing some music Iâ€™ve done some soulful house stuff and I loved it, it was very different for me. Thereâ€™s a producer over here named Brian Power who puts out some great stuff and Iâ€™ve put some stuff out with those guys. I worked with a guy from Amsterdam DJ Deefus we did a song called â€œHold On.â€ Aside from that Iâ€™ve definitely been working on completing my next album Iâ€™m three-quarters of the way there. Itâ€™s just that Iâ€™m quite picky and fussy things tend to take a little bit longer but getting there but the end goal is to get an album out in the not too distant future.

I would like to thank my fans whoâ€™ve been with me on this journey because I know I have not been very present but Iâ€™ve always been out there doing my thing youâ€™re always thankful because I know I have a great following out there. Thank everybody and I hope theyâ€™re keeping safe in these crazy times. I hope they find solace listening to my music and other music out there as well. Do look for my forthcoming album, I havenâ€™t got a date for it or a title but itâ€™s coming. The pandemic has stopped everybody in their tracks but Iâ€™ve become more determined to get this project finished. I look forward to hitting the stage again.

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