

Music Review: Maysa Leak-Metamorphosis



It is a rare pleasure these days to hear a singer with a completely original sound, an immediately recognizable voice and style that mesmerizes with sheer tonal beauty. Such an artist is Maysa, who, like Anita Baker (to whom she is sometimes compared) occupies a completely unique niche in the musical cosmos, at the intersection of jazz and soul. But Maysa has ranged far more widely, into the realms of Acid Jazz, as a featured vocalist with Incognito, and dance music. Her multi-faceted artistry is part of what makes her special but it may also be a reason why she has not been more widely known, despite the fervor of her fans, in a world that depends far too much on easy categorization. The release of her seventh album, METAMORPHOSIS, an impressive set of all-original material that follows up on her two acclaimed albums of classic soul, may well be the album that takes her to the next level of appreciation as one of the foremost contemporary vocalists on the scene today.

“My vision for this album,” Maysa notes, “was to change the music a little bit to be in line with the way I feel spiritually and emotionally. On a couple of my previous albums I was playing it a little too safe. I’m not afraid to express myself now!”

METAMORPHOSIS is the result of a creative process that involved Maysa’s collaborations with a number of producers and writers, among them producers/songwriters/ Rex Rideout (Ledisi, Will Downing), Chris “Big Dog” Davis (George Clinton, Phil Perry) and underground soul fave Angela Johnson. Sometimes Maysa was inspired to write by a rhythm track that was developed for her and at other times the inspiration came more or less out of the blue.

“I like being an A & R person, calling people and finding songs.” Maysa confides. “Sometimes Rex or Chris gave me tracks to listen to and I picked ones out that I liked and

wrote with them.

But on “Grateful,” I was late to Rex’s studio one day and when I came in I heard the idea they were working on and the song just came out of me! it was kind of magical! As for “Happy Feelings,” Angela Johnson had this song that she said she had given to me before and she thought that I hadn’t liked it so she re-worked it. When I heard it, I said, “I didn’t hear that before! it’s great!”

Sometimes life itself provided inspiration as on the Ronnie Garrett/Herman Johnson production “Walk Away,” which was written by producer Lorenzo Johnson and Ledisi. “Ledisi came to one of my concerts,” Maysa relates, “and I had just broken up with my boyfriend at the time. I was telling the story and she thought a song he was writing would be perfect for me.

“I Need A Man,” may be one of her most controversial songs to date, but Maysa wants to assure her audience that it is not a song about being desperate for a man, but about rebuilding the family structure, much like the message that Presidential Candidate Barack Obama spoke of in one of his most eloquent speeches he has made during his campaign. “I grew up with a strong father and I want and pray for and am waiting for a man who will be that kind of man for me.

“I believe that if we rebuild the family structure, we can raise children with high self-esteem which will in turn bless the world with stronger, more thoughtful human beings which will definitely change the world.”

METAMORPHOSIS offers many high points that underscore Maysa’s impressive ability to project her soul into different musical contexts. Songs such as “Simpatico” deliver the kind funky Brazilian-inflected jazz that Maysa has been noted for with Incognito, as well as on her own albums. “Never Really Ever” is slinky neo-soul while “I Need A

Manâ€ is a straightforward R & B ballad wherein Maysa delivers a â€letâ€™s get realâ€ message for her sisters. â€Letâ€™s Figure It Out (A Song for Bluey)â€ offers a twist as it begins with a long contemporary jazz jam that suddenly morphs into a flat-out dance track. And â€Conversation With The Universeâ€ finds Maysa scatting over an edgy track created for her by Global Noize (Jason Miles & DJ Logic). â€I wasnâ€™t sure if that one was going to be too â€~outâ€™ for my listeners,â€ Maysa laughs, â€but I played it for some friends and they loved it!â€

METAMORPHOSIS also features some impressive guest performers; saxophonist/flautist Najee and guitarist Nick Colionne and drummer/producer Michael White.

[Listen To I Need A Man](#)

Maysa Leak was born and raised in Baltimore, MD and knew by the time she was six that she would be a musician. â€It was when my parents took me to see the musical Purlie,â€ she recalls. â€The moment Melba Moore took the stage and opened her mouth, I made my decision that music would be my fate.â€ She graduated from Morgan State University with a degree in classical performance, meeting Stevie Wonder while a student. Upon graduating, she moved to North Hollywood to join Stevie Wonderâ€™s â€Wonderloveâ€, with whom she performed for a year, performing on the Jungle Fever soundtrack and such television shows as Oprah and The Tonight Show. During this time she also met one of her main influences, Chaka Khan, â€Stevie took us out to see one of Chakaâ€™s shows,â€ she remembers,â€ and during her concert she invited fans to come onstage and sing with her. Most of these singers were trying to out-sing Chaka. So she would heckle them. Stevie asked me to go on stage and sing with her. At first I said â€~noâ€™ but once I decided to get up I knew I had to do something different. So I scatted. When I did that, Chaka said â€~Go â€~head girl! The whole audience went crazy. Chaka Khan will forever be an influence. Her power and tone have inspired me

to develop my own voice and be unique, sweet and powerful, all at the same time.â€

In the early Nineties, Maysa auditioned over the phone to become the new lead singer of the acclaimed British jazz/funk/R & B band Incognito, moving to London for four and a half years. She has appeared on over nine Incognito recordings and continues to appear as a featured vocalist with them from time to time.

Maysa then recorded her self-titled debut album for GRP in 1995, following it up with ALL MY LIFE in 1999, and OUT OF THE BLUE in 2002, SMOOTH SAILING in 2004. She then made an impact with her interpretations of classic soul music on two acclaimed albums for Shanachie, SWEET CLASSIC SOUL (2005) and FEEL THE FIRE (2007), on which she showed her ability to put her own unique stamp on familiar songs from the 1970â€™s era.

While some may advise Maysa to concentrate on one musical direction, she refuses to limit herself because the many directions she explores are all a part of her soul. â€œBeing a female Will Downing, or Luther Vandross, a balladeer, is part of my niche,â€ she says,â€ but a lot of jazz and funk will always be in me too. My hero is Sarah Vaughn, so I have always said Iâ€™m on the road to Straight Ahead (Jazz)! I just had that conversation with Bluey (of Incognito). Itâ€™s all in me!!

Soultracks.com Awards 2007



Soultracks.com took their online poll of stunning but

underrated soulstars offline to Detroit's Cobo Hall for an evening of honors and performance on a cold and wintry November 16th that had all of winter's feeling but no snow. A cadre of soul bloggers, musicians, soul fans and their friends took in the grassroots-efforted affair inside the venue's Riverview Ballroom overlooking the murky water shared by Michigan and Canada. Jodine of [Jodine's corner](#) hosted the event and blessed the night with David Bowie's quote that "Major labels will be in shambles in the next ten years." She left out part of the quote where he also says that "touring will be the only unique situation left."

It is the constant travels of Eric Roberson, Maya Azucena, Maysa Leak, Phil Perry and a chain of other independent soul artists that have allowed them to have careers outside the shareholder-driven worlds of Viacom, Universal, Sony Bmg, Warner and EMI. The readers of Soultracks.com did not pick their winners from the nationalized playlists of terrestrial radio but the niche economies of online music.

For the price of the ticket spectators saw Rahsaan Patterson sing "Stop Breaking My Heart" from the Album of the Year winner *Wines and Spirits*. Patterson's unplanned but professional appearance benefitted from sassy ad-libs with one of the house band's polished back-up singers. Russell Thompkins Jr., the famous lead-singing falsetto of The Stylistics received a lifetime achievement award and a tribute from Maysa Leak and Phil Perry. Leak's deep tone that has influenced many critics to compare her sound to the solumn sexiness of Sade sang a careful reneition of "Betcha By Golly Wow." But it was Phil Perry's fire-starting version of "Stop, Look, Listen" that made the audience stand-up, clap and wonder for the milllionth time why larger American audiences have not followed him since his Billboard-charting cover of Aretha's "Call Me." Maya Azucena who has caught the spirit with the experimental funk jazz of Burnt Sugar in the past sang her acoustic single "Junkyard Jewell" never flinching when the mic

died. Eric Roberson, Kloud 9, Gordon Chambers and El Renee also made the stage and gave their best. Kickmag spoke with some of the artists that night to ask them about what the night felt like for them and what was going on with their careers.

Maysa

How does it feel to win female vocalist of the year?

Unbelievable, it's just a beautiful surprising feeling. It's a people's choice award it means the people voted for me so I must be doing something right.

The last couple of albums have been classic songs, what made you want to do more covers?

The record company hired me and I love these songs, I grew-up on these songs it was an honor to sing them.

Do you have a favorite song from the latest collection [Feel The Fire](#)?

"Happy Feeling."

Any wishlist of who you would like to work with?

Um Frank Mccomb, Eric Roberson and I would really like to work with Chaka Khan I would like her to produce me.

Gordon Chambers

You are a known songwriter, when you write do you ever have anyone particular in mind or does it just flow through you?

Yes I mean I can do it when I write for an artist specifically or I can just write generally it doesn't make a difference.

How does it feel to be nominated tonight?

It was wonderful it was a wonderful experience to have my hard work be acknowledged and my appearance.

As someone who works behind the scenes a lot and you are an independent artist. How do you feel about file-sharing and webcasting?

It's hurtful and it's helpful. Its helpful as a promotional vehicle it's hurtful because it makes things available for free. It's about balance and I think that right now the technology will find a way to make it fair and equitable to all. But it does make things like youtube gives independent artists more of a visual presence with our sound. In our instance it is helpful.

That was a nice song you did with El Renee we know you did it originally with Ledisi and you have worked with a lot of people. Are there any people on your wishlist?

Oh yeah, I'd love to work with Alicia Keys I'd love to work with Mary J.Blige I'd love to work with Seal, I'd love to work with Sting, I'd love to work with Prince I'd love to work with Stevie Wonder, Celine Dion tons of artists to work with neverending.

You've written some classic songs yourself such as Anita Baker's "I Apologize" and Angie Stones' "No More Rain" among others. Are there any songs out there that you wished you wrote?

Oh yeah there's tons of songs I wished I wrote. I love Eric Roberson's "Couldn't Hear Me" I love that. When I first got that CD I listened to that song 15 times in a row I swear to you in a row because it encapsulated so many things I've thought and gone through in relationships. Yeah a great song is a great song whenever you hear a great song you say 'I wish I wrote that.'

So what's next I know we are still listening to [Love Stories](#)?

Next I am going to release a live album. I'm in the studio with Aretha Franklin right now her album is about to drop next

year. I have a cut on Angie Stone's album that just came out that debuted at number 1. And I have been working with a young artist on Def Jam called Karina Pasian I'm really excited about she is a young prodigy genius. She's 16 and plays the piano and speaks 5 languages amazing.

Where is she from?

She's from New York from the um Spanish Harlem, Washington Heights she's Dominican.

A lot of people don't know you were on Being Bobby Brown how was that? did it raise your profile?

Yeah a lot of people saw my face. I don't know what people thought of Bobby or thought of the show but even when I was in other countries people would say 'I saw your face' Anything you can have to have your face out there and Bobby and Whitney have always been very good to me and I had absolutely no problem supporting one of their ventures because they supported mine.

Is there anything else you want to add?

The website is www.gordonchambers.com .

Russell Thompkins Jr.

How does it feel to get this Lifetime Achievement Awards?

It feels very fantastic because this is the first time something like this has ever happened in my life. I've gotten awards before I've been in situations like this but never at this time in my life.

Did it catch you by surprise?

No it didn't catch me by surprise but I am very honored tremendously.

What did you think of the tribute given to you tonight?

Well I'm a loooooong time great fan of Phil Perry. He is one of the most phenomenal vocalists I ever heard in my life. The lady who came and sang after him was very great too. Maysa she sang the song really really nice. But Phil is just one of a kind.

How does it feel to hear your influence travel through artists even today?

I've been around a long time and I have been in situations where people have sang my music before to hear my influence in it. But Phil did not my song with my influence he did it the way he wanted to. He is a seasoned artist and has been around as long as I have. Younger people who do my music I can hear when they are growing and what type of artist they are to take from the old to give to the new.

What made you do this latest project [The Three Tenors](#)?

This idea has been thrown around for a long time but we just didn't know which tenors were gonna do it. William Harwick is one of the biggest influences in my musical career. When I was 17-years old the first TV program I did I was in high school "La La Means I Love You" after William Hart had sang that. And Ted Mills I didn't know Ted as a singer when I first met him he was a songwriter he wrote three songs for me that I never got a chance to record but they were so wonderful that I never forgot them. So both of them have been a great influence on my career and my life.

Q.Are you going to tour that album?

No, I'm working with my group [The Stylistics](#) right now doing music that I made and trying to keep that going but I have a solo CD that I'm working on right now. And we're going into the studio to record the new Stylistics a DVD already made and a CD of the new Stylistics coming out.

Is that old or new footage?

It's only a couple of months old we did it with the Myrtle Beach Symphony

What do you think of contemporary soul music?

The soul music of today that I heard tonight had the influence of the older music. Some soul music that is out right now might be a little bit to the hip-hop side. I don't hate hip-hop but I don't understand hip-hop. It goes a little too much to the hip-hop side my ears don't listen as well as it does when it stays more to the hip-hop side.