

BRIGHT NEW DAY

Written by Bill Buckley
Sunday, 24 May 2009 05:54



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By common consent JAMES DAY'S 'Natural Things' album is one of 2009's best modern soul releases. Its delightful and varied grooves have wowed the worldwide soul crowd, but, surprisingly, for such an acclaimed album little is known about its enigmatic creator. To put that right www.soulandjazzandfunk.com set its soul sleuths the task of tracking down MR. DAY. The genial Bostonian was delighted to talk with us. He told us that he was born in the famous fishing town of Rockport but lived in New York in his late teens and twenties where he immersed himself in the magic music of the Big Apple. Dogged, as he was, by all kinds of adversity, JAMES was determined to make music and he's now rightly acclaimed ... but first we wanted to know more about his musical background... so what about favourite artists and those all-important influences?

.....The first album I ever owned was NATALIE COLE'S 'Inseparable'. It was given to me by my grandfather. But the other influential albums, songs, writers, producers and artists of my childhood were ASHFORD and SIMPSON, DIANA ROSS (especially 'The Boss' album), CHAKA KHAN, ROD TEMPERTON and QUINCY JONES, BACHARACH/DAVID, GOFFIN and KING, GAMBLE and HUFF, BARRY GIBB ... even COLE PORTER, GERSHWIN and IRVING BERLIN.

But what about a particular favourite ... the biggest influence?

That's kind of hard, but when I was at college - training to be to be a singer and dancer- I lost my hearing and balance from Menieres Disease...yet even after surgery which removed my hearing and balance function from one ear, my love for music continued and I resolved to be a songwriter. So I was kind of different and needed to be free of my own life struggles; two songs therefore really impacted on me - DONNY HATHAWAY'S 'Someday We'll All Be Free' and his

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'Little Ghetto Boy' ... I was a different kind of boy, an outcast in a different kind of ghetto...but I knew what DONNY was feeling and when he sang 'everything's got to get better' I needed to believe him...

Did that finally make you take up music as a career?

Well, after a little success in NYC as a dancer in a nationally syndicated TV show and appearing in a couple of videos including one by CHAKA KHAN, the Menieres syndrome finally took my hearing and balance on one side and my dream of singing and dancing went with it. After a period of believing music would no longer be any part of my life ...I even covered my albums in sheets because they were too painful to look at (my bedroom looked like a cemetery) Then I slowly let music back into my life and began writing songs...mind you, I was in a school for sign language and deaf studies and bear in mind I lived with a 1 in 4 chance of the same thing happening in the other ear...but nevertheless I kept writing and eventually won first place and grand prize in both the Billboard Magazine and JOHN LENNON song contests (Gospel and R&B categories) and The Songwriters Hall of Fame/National Academy of Popular Music presented me with the ABE OLMAN Award for Songwriting Excellence which is given to the most promising up and coming songwriter chosen by ASACP. One of my heroes, music legend HAL DAVID presented me with the award. It was at that time I knew I was good and went on to pursue some major labels - but mostly in the teen pop genre which is what was available to songwriters at that time.

Tell us more about how you create your music...

I write lyrics and melodies first, then arrangements and production ideas come into my head and I share them with the musicians, co-writers, and producers I work with and we build up the track together. I also like to be very involved in the vocal arrangement, vocal recording/production and mixing. The vocal is KING!

... And how do you record it?

I believe in the old fashioned way of making albums...not the modern way - one man behind a computer with samples and beats. You need to start with a great song and if you've got great

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songs, you'll get great singers. Then, build a great production letting everyone do what they do best...singers sing, writers write and the players play.

Tell us how you hooked up with Expansion Records?

UK DJ ROGER WILLIAMS and his wife LETTIE discovered my music online and started spinning 'Don't Waste The Pretty' ...it became a single, then appeared on an EP - 'Remember When'; then Expansion put out the full length album 'Better Days'. Expansion is a great supporter of mine and I couldn't have made this new album without them. And I originally chose Expansion based on the quality of their catalogue which I think speaks for itself

Any views on the current state of soul music?

In my opinion it's just beats, samples - tracks with random mindless words slapped on top ... computerized oral noises. It doesn't work for the mind, body and soul - which is what real soul music does for me. Most of the stuff masquerading as soul doesn't even penetrate my mind for a full minute. There are exceptions though - notably the great LALAH HATHAWAY and WILL DOWNING

What about your plans for the future?

Simple - I need a wealthy soul music devotee who wants to invest in my future so I can continue to write and produce songs and other projects at an even higher quality and in greater quantity and at faster speed. More immediately though, I am very excited about a song I recently wrote with LALAH and I'm looking forward to her next release. I'm also hoping to come over to the UK with one of the great singers from my album performing some of my songs.

JAMES DAY'S 'Natural Things' album is out now on Expansion Records. Check out the review on our review pages and for more information and the latest news from JAMES go to www.myspace.com/jamesdaysongs