

Joss Stone: Water For Your Soul

“Water For Your Soul is about finding your own fulfilment, doing what you really want to do,” explains Joss Stone. “For me, it’s music. But water for your soul can be anything. Some people like food, some people like to dance, some like to travel. Music is necessary for me - it feeds my soul, the same way water feeds a flower. It’s also about being brave and letting go.”

Prepare to be amazed and delighted by Joss Stone. The free spirited English soul singer has been on an incredible journey, metaphorical and literal, artistic and geographic, absorbing influences and making music. *Water For Your Soul* is the fruits of her travels in sound, demonstrating how the teen soul prodigy has blossomed into an artist of style and substance. It is an album that pulses with the liquid groove of reggae, dazzles with the mix and match sonic adventure of hip hop, shimmers with the exotic sounds of world music and delivers the emotional belt of R’n’B. “It’s really a combination of all the things I like,” explains Joss. “I’ll always have that bluesy, soul thing because it is in my voice. But these are new songs for me to sing, which is exciting.”

The album has been four years in gestation, the product of world travels, emotional adventures, and smoky jams with reggae royalty. A core musical strand can be traced back to LA sessions for Dave Stewart and Mick Jagger project *Superheavy*, on which Stone collaborated with Jamaican superstar Damien Marley. “At night, Damien and I would hang out. Wherever he goes he gets a studio, just to have the freedom to play and create a vibe. It’s like a party every day, warm Guinness and a ridiculous amount of weed.” In a hidden complex beneath the legendary Sunset Marquee, Stone recorded for a Marley solo project and jammed with his band, writing some new songs, *Love Me* and *Wake Up*. “I’ve always loved reggae and Damien gave me the confidence to go through that door. I’m not Jamaican, and I don’t speak patois but listening to Damien and his mates, this language is so gorgeous, and it’s got a melody to it and it helped me to put things together that fit that style of music.”

Joss continued her reggae education back home with legendary British based veteran Dennis Bovell, with whom she co-wrote *The Answer*. “He’s like a reggae encyclopaedia. And he can really sing. His pitch and range is massive. He’s funny too, a great person to work with.” But while Joss and her long term musical collaborator Jonathan Shorten embraced reggae influences, it was just one element of an ever expanding musical picture. “I like music and I’m not particularly obsessed with one style over any other. I just like listening to it and then becoming a part of it.” Another key collaborator was Mercury award winning British-Indian producer-composer Nitin Sawhney. “We became friends, I drop into his radio show and we’ve collaborated on things. His influence has been quite important. He has such a wealth of knowledge about the music of different countries, he’s really helped me to execute ideas I would get on my travels.”

Because travel is at the heart of *Water For Your Soul*, emotionally as well as musically. Away from the glare of showbusiness, Joss has nurtured her inner hippie, quietly dropping out from the pop scene to travel Europe for months in a beat up camper van with a boyfriend. “I just took what I had and off I went. There was a real sense of freedom, like this is life, it tastes good.” Many of the songs are rooted in those experiences on the road, working on a boat in Spain, spending a month broken down outside a bar in France, living in a forest, making new friends,

moving on. Songs span the break-up of one love affair (*Let Me Breathe*) and the beginning of another (*Stuck On You*). “If there is a theme to the album, it springs out of conversations, arguments, ideas about ways of living in the world. It’s about shaking off all the crap and getting up and realising that hey you’re alive today, so move on.”

In 2014, after years of dreaming and planning, Joss began her *Total World Tour*, with the aim of performing in every country on the planet, collaborating with local indigenous musicians. She has visited Morocco, Dubai, South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Australia, New Zealand and this year is touring South America with planned visits to North Africa and Eastern Europe. Gigs have ranged from stadium concerts to club shows and acoustic jamming sessions, while she has also been taking the opportunity to work with local charities and learn about humanitarian and environmental issues. “Musically, it kind of feeds me. And all these encounters and conversations lead to different things.”

Most of the songs for *Water For Your Soul* had been written and demoed before Joss’s *Total World Tour* began but widening horizons convinced her to completely rethink and recut the record. “There was a different energy and it was exciting.” The sound expanded to include Indian tabla, Bengali lute, Bansuri flute, African and Asian percussion, plus gospel choirs, New Orleans horns and full orchestra. After various experiments, abandoned and revisited sessions, the final album was more or less completed in a ten day frenzy, with strings being recorded in London, percussion in Hawaii and Joss pulling it together at her own Home Grown Studios in Devon. “So now we have an album with lots of different sounds on it,” she says, brightly. “It’s not massively, scarily different, because soul and hip hop are such a big part of what I do. But it’s a little departure, a bit of an adventure.”

At 27, Stone has been in music half her life. She won BBC talent show *Star For A Night* aged 13, signed to a major label at 15, and released her debut album, *The Soul Sessions*, aged 16. She has sold over 12 million albums worldwide, her American success paving the way for a new generation of British female soul singers. And yet, in many ways, Stone is still an unknown quantity with maverick tendencies, steadfastly refusing to conform to the industries idea of a beautiful, blonde pop star. “I have pissed a few people off,” she acknowledges. “If you go outside the box that people expect you to be in, it can make some people a uncomfortable. But, hey ho. I don’t choose to be careful. I try not to let criticism or negativity even come into my mind.”

Water For Your Soul is her seventh album and will be released on Joss’s own Stone’d label, which she set up after her deal with EMI ended in 2011. Her idealistic approach shines through her new album. “Some people play music to pay their bills, some have a story to tell, some people make music to become famous. Every reason is valid, because it’s your own personal reason, and once you’ve figured it out, you know where you’re going. The reason I do it is because it fills me up. It’s like a drug to me. It’s like it tastes good and it smells good and it’s warm. If I’m walking down the street and I hear a busker playing, it makes my day better. And I guess I’m addicted to having that in my life. And that’s why I do it, to share that feeling with other people.”