

CELEBRITY NEWS



Terri interviews LA singer/songwriter of the year, AM

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- Awesome!

It's loud, it's enthusiastic, and it's accompanied by a bright smile that looks like an advertisement for a Beverly Hills dentist. This, as it turns out, is the word you'll hear at least a dozen times an hour in the company of New Orleans-born singer/songwriter AM. He's just finished a set at the Hotel Café. The gig has gone well, his band was awesome and his cameraman has just informed him that he got some great footage.

AM looks almost Italian, with his dark locks hanging casually down in his eyes, in a style I'm guessing might not be as casual as it looks, and sideburns that are only about half an inch too short to match Elvis. As far as clothing goes he looks like something out of a fashion magazine, as he's wearing a dark blue suit with matching blue shirt and open collar.

- I'll be right with you, he promises as his phone rings and he leaves me in the care of his band. Few minutes later he returns, laughing heartedly at something someone said and whisks me with him backstage. He throws a water bottle in my direction and we sit down, ready to get down to business.

How would you say growing up in New Orleans influenced you as far as becoming a musician?

- Well, growing up in Louisiana was a very rich experience. It is a very laid back place and by the time I was 15 I was playing in bars in my first band with me and a bunch of high school buddies. We did well actually. There was nothing to do in Mandeville so everyone came to our gigs, even the high school teachers! I also worked in a music store while in high school where all the employees there were in a bluegrass band so there were all these amazing musicians coming into the store for these impromptu jam sessions. These guys were the real deal. They had no interest in making a living off music, it was purely for the joy and they were bad ass! he grins.

- It was later, when I moved into New Orleans, that I soaked up more of the funk, jazz and blues that is so characteristic of that city. Although I'm a pop writer I think all of the above styles have worked their way into my music somehow. The most obvious element to my music that embodies these influences is

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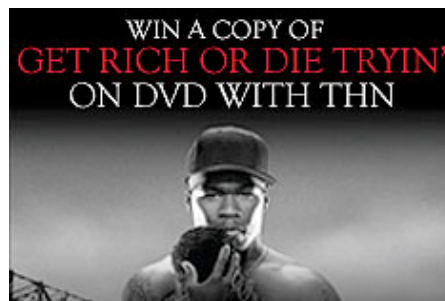
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the groove element. My songs tend to flow.

AM has been described as taking equal parts of classic Americana, folk-rock and pop, and melts them down into something entirely his own, and he does it with two things money can't buy: imagination and taste. Gary Jules went on to saying that he sounds like a mixture of Paul Simon and David Bowie. But who were his early musical influences?

- As a kid it was popular music. My father liked 70's music, and although I didn't really grow up in the 70's that music was around a lot. You know, The Eagles, The Rolling Stones, Fleetwood Mac. Pure 70's pop rock gems! Later, when I picked up the guitar, cock rock and metal were in full effect. I undoubtedly was affected by it, but thankfully for not very long, he laughs.

- Soon thereafter my father moved us down to Louisiana, and that was when I really started to diversify my tastes.

Any early stories? Like how and when did you write your first song and do you still use it?

- Ahhh! Well, I wasn't much of a songwriter in New Orleans. Mostly just a guitarist, after I picked up the guitar at age 13 after seeing a Guns N' Roses video on MTV, and never really let go since. I took various guitar lessons, but I was never a very good student. I guess I have ADD to some extent. But I always kept cassette tapes full of ideas. Riffs, progressions and such. I still do that. I think the first real song I wrote was called "End Of The Day." It's actually not bad, and it's on an old demo that will probably end up on eBay one of these days! he chuckles.

- I think "Running Away" off my debut album was like the fifth song I ever wrote. I still feel young in the realm of song writing, like I'm just getting started.

About four years ago, AM decided to move to Hollywood on impulse. He was too scared to move to New York and figured LA was a much easier place to struggle.

- If you can't pay the electric bill it's still going to be 75 degrees and sunny. I found my first few months in town very depressing with no friends, no job, no place to live. LA is a weird animal. There are all these people out in the daytime seemingly unemployed. Later you find out they are all musicians and actors!

When we first met with AM in February this year, we caught him onstage with Gary Jules that's best known for his remake of the Tears for Fears classic "Mad World". How and when did he hook up with Gary and his future producer Jamie Myerson?

- I met Gary and Jamie after hearing about this little coffee shop where singer/songwriters were gathering. I also heard that this guy Gary Jules was running the show and sort of "hand picked" everyone who would play there. He made sure that people were of a certain level so as to keep the bar raised talent wise. I thought, what the hell, and went in, made the cut evidently and the rest is history. Jamie Myerson was helping Gary out, running sound at night and producing records during the day. Eventually we decided we needed to make a record, and that was what became my first release.

These days we are seeing music charts around the world being dominated by manufactured singers and bands, but every now and then someone with an extraordinary raw talent appears, and

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Give me an insight to the making of your first album compared to making the current record?

- The first album was made almost entirely by Jamie and me. We wrote every part, every drum beat, everything. We obsessed over the arrangements and spent hours coming up with the perfect sound, had various players come in and play a little here and there, but mostly it was just the two of us. Most people don't know this but half that record is programmed drums. In fact, there are only real drums on three of the songs!

- The major differences between making the first record and the one we're working on now is that I have a full band now, so they are taking over most of the work in writing their own parts. This time around I'm also producing most of the album. The whole dynamic is different though. I don't have to obsess and write every part. I have a basic vision and toss the song to the band, let them do their thing and then I take what they do and sort of trim the fat and polish the edges. It's much like a producer would do in the old days; you shape the recording without dominating it.

- As far as playing, I do all the acoustic guitars and vocals, and that's really it now a days. During the making of the first record I did a lot more; electric guitar, keys, some bass and percussion. I'm glad I can now leave that to people that are much better at it than I am. Every day in the studio is a great day. I'm constantly blown away by the musicians I work with.

How do you write your songs and find inspiration?

- Mostly I write on my guitar. A few years back when I broke my wrist, I was forced to write with vocal melodies and ever since then it has dominated my writing style. Now I usually sing a melody and then do the guitar. Before it was the reverse. As far as inspiration, it's everywhere, man," he says, sits back and takes a deep breath. "Painful memories... books... films... things like that. You know what I'm talking about."

He takes a mini time-out before a smile spreads across his face and he leans forward, "I think all artists have a song by someone else they wish they had written. For me it's "I'll be around" by The Spinners. You know it?" I say I'm not sure. "Motown, man! Come on!" And here he starts singing, to refresh my memory, "You made your choice, now it's up to me to bow out gracefully. Though you hold the key, but baby, whenever you call me, I'll be there. Whenever you want me, I'll be there. Whenever you need me, I'll be there. I'll be around..."

After catching up on the likes of Stevie Wonder and Smokey Robinson, I move us back on track. Since the release of his self-titled album in 2003, many of his songs have been used on TV shows like MTV's "Real World" and "Life As We Know It". But how does he go about making this happen, and what does it mean to him?

- I could just recently quit having terrible day jobs and start living off my music. Getting my songs in film and TV has helped a lot with that. Out of the 10 songs off my debut album eight of them have been place in either a movie or television show. Actually, I think "Home" and "So Lonely" are the only tracks that have not been used. And what's even better is that they have all approached me. I have never actively solicited to film and TV, so I've been lucky I guess.

Obviously, before there was TV play, there was radio play. He remembers the first time he heard his own song on the radio well.

- It was on this classic rock station in LA called KLOS. They had a locals night and they played three of my songs! I was so excited, and remember taping them and driving around in my car repeatedly listening to it. There's something about that radio compression that just makes it sound so... good, you know? Shortly thereafter KCRW began playing my songs as well. I was in bed at home and someone called and said "turn on the radio, man, they're playing your song!" That day I felt extremely validated. I thought "well these guys have great taste in music and if they are playing my stuff then I must be doing something right!"

AM is about to embark on an extensive UK tour of 22 gigs in 20 days all over England and Scotland.

What's the story behind your trip to the UK?

- After doing the Inciting Scenes interview in February there was an overwhelming response in the UK that, in addition to the exposure on KCRW, prompted a goal to tour the UK. After getting the CD to a few promoters it's kind of taken on a life of its own. Promoters contacting other promoters. It's crazy, really, how supportive Britain has been and I haven't even played one gig yet!

- I really look forward to travelling the country doing what I love to do and I'm terribly excited to be playing in a country with such a great musical past. Some of my favourite bands are from England. So I'd like to do the best that I can so I can come back again. And hopefully bring the band at some point. I'd like to get the record distributed in the UK and then hopefully begin branching out into other European territories.

In a perfect world, where would you be professionally, say, next year?

- Doing the same thing I'm doing now, he says. But with a bigger budget! he quickly adds with a laugh and a wink.

To read more about AM and the upcoming tour, click onto www.incitingscenes.com and/or www.amsounds.com

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