

# Sarah Brown

## A Heart Full Of Soul

**“When I see the look on people’s faces and see they’re really listening and they’re getting the blues of this project and the jazz of it, that is so satisfying,” declares Sarah Brown of her Sings Mahalia Jackson show and album, on which she interprets magnificently songs like ‘Didn’t It Rain’, ‘Just A Closer Walk’, ‘Joshua’ and ‘Amazing Grace’.**

“I’m not Mahalia Jackson and to put myself in the same category as her is to be foolish. But I’m trying to express myself in a passionate, authentic way – which is what Mahalia taught me.”

Brown first listened to the gospel legend as a troubled child. “My father was a beautiful man when he was happy but when unhappy he brought about a lot of fear at home. I saw a lot. I saw my mother beaten. And I was only fourteen when [we] ran away, to a battered wives’ hostel.”

Brown found solace in Jackson’s music and also in singing in her Pentecostal Church. “The people I call the Windrush soldiers would go to Church of England churches and find hostility so they formed their own churches and they sang with electric guitar and bass and Hammond organ and drums. It’s like going to a James Brown concert because when they start playing and singing, they let rip!”

Brown began singing with The Inspirational Choir who recorded for CBS. “We were fuelled by the Windrush mothers and fathers who sang their hymns with the fervency of, ‘Help me, God, because I want to get back to the Caribbean.’ And we were taught to listen to each other when we sang and to harmonise and really throw our voices.”

While with The Inspirational Choir Brown was headhunted for a Stevie Wonder session. “He was looking for a singer to do some backing vocals and I was called to the studio,” remembers Brown. “As simple as that. Stevie wasn’t there but the producers told me what to sing and I sang it.”

She actually did meet Wonder later when she toured with jazz-funk hitmakers Incognito. “Stevie was a fan and in L.A. he comes on stage and starts singing with us! I said, ‘Stevie, you don’t remember me but I sang backing vocals for you in the 80s.’ And he said, ‘I do remember!’ I don’t even remember the track but he bloody well remembered it and remembered me!”

Brown subsequently toured with Roxy Music, Duran Duran, Simply Red, Simple Minds and others. “A good backing singer needs humility. You need to be a genuine supporter of whoever you’re working with,” she reflects. “You need to understand what the artist is about.” She explains how she set out to develop her career. “I went to teacher training college. I only lasted two years but those years taught me discipline, how to focus, how to plan. When I left I was determined I was going to be a top backing singer and I gave myself ten years. I said the signs I’d arrived were going to be that the artist was going to phone me - I wouldn’t need an agent -and I’d be able to buy a Mercedes!”

By and by Brown’s masterplan panned out. “[Duran Duran’s] Simon Le Bon phoned me and said, ‘Sarah, listen to this line and sing it.’ I sang it and Simon said, ‘You’ve got the job!’ And Bryan Ferry rang me and when I went in and started singing he lay on the floor by my feet and started smiling. I knew I’d got the job.” But many of Brown’s experiences were bruising. “I’ve been in the music business for easily forty years and it’s the most politically incorrect institution you’re ever going to come across, full of racism, full of prejudice, full of ageism.”

In 2018, Brown faced a personal crisis when her marriage broke up. “It took a very long time to heal the wounds of that experience,” she sighs. “I listened to Mahalia and gained strength from her and *Sarah Brown Sings Mahalia Jackson* has been like therapy. “When I thought about what was involved in doing the album with no sponsorship and no confidence it would have been easy to just forget about it. But I said, ‘Come on, girl, you can do this.’ And, God, it’s been a journey. When the divorce was final I didn’t feel as if I could live but the album helped me to heal and there are over a million hits on Spotify so I know it’s brought joy to people.”

Trevor Hodgett  
sarahbrownofficial.com  
*Sarah Brown Sings Mahalia Jackson*  
is out now



# BLUESBLOODED

## WALTER TROUT BROKEN HEARTED BLUES

THE VETERAN BLUESMAN **WALTER TROUT** RELEASES HIS 31<sup>ST</sup> (COUNT ‘EM) ALBUM **BROKEN** ON 1<sup>ST</sup> MARCH 2024. IT’S ANOTHER QUALITY RELEASE FROM A MAN WHO’S WEATHERED EVERY STORM THAT LIFE HAS THROWN AT HIM. SIMON GREEN SPOKE TO HIM AT HIS REMOTE HOME IN DENMARK, A FISHING VILLAGE OF JUST FIVE HUNDRED PEOPLE, SITUATED ON THE NORTH SEA COAST – AS THE REST OF HIS FAMILY PARTIED TO THE JAMES BROWN CHRISTMAS ALBUM.

“I want to expand and grow,  
not be stuck in a box”