



Ashley Cleveland

Ashley Cleveland is a female singer/songwriter based in Nashville who, at 34, was resigned to backing singer status. That is, until she sang on a Memphis Horns project with John Hiatt which ended up on the desk of Atlantic Records founder Ahmet Ertegun. Guess whose voice got singled out for comment. An A&R person was dispatched forthwith to catch a showcase performance on her home ground and the unknown singer was signed within weeks — with the personal seal of approval of one of the industry's legendary talent spotters.

But Ashley Cleveland's debut LP, *Big Town*, is the product of years of hard work and *stickatitability*. She says she's been singing and writing since she was sixteen, when she used to migrate to the coffee bars of Marin County California for the summer. This was an era when acoustic music was in full bloom and Ashley cites Neil Young, James Taylor and Crosby Stills and Nash as early influences, although she was aiming at an "edgier" sound.

On *Big Town* she sometimes comes over like a female Tina Turner, minus the raunch factor. It's surely no accident that the only female singer in recent memory to

appear on her record cover in a buttoned up shirt and baggy blazer (rather than a bustier) is also a committed Christian. Does she see herself as a white gospel singer?

"I certainly love gospel music," affirms Ashley over the line from Nashville, "I'm equally fond of rock, which is a different animal but I kind of sing from the blues side of everything. I feel things from the back side of the beat and I have a blues approach to just about everything I get my hands on, including some of the soul stuff on the record, but it's kind of a mixture of musical idioms, rock, blues and soul."

Living in Nashville, is it hard to keep a country flavour out of your work?

"Not really. My band members all live here and none of them are country players. A lot of people argue that rock'n'roll is a hybrid of country so to some extent I think that would creep in no matter where you lived. I think country meets the blues and became rock'n'roll is the way historians understand it."

What's kept you working at your craft minus a record deal all these years?

"It was just the personal growth that I experienced, I'd get better at my craft and that was always really encouraging to me. Also, I reached

the point where I knew there was nothing else in terms of a life pursuit that I would go after with any kind of passion or enthusiasm the way I felt about music. And on some level I felt it was just really necessary for me to do it regardless of the level of success I experienced. I recognised — because at the time I was a single parent with a small child — that I might not be able to sustain a living and I might have to work a regular day job, but my ambition was to stay with the music. Everybody wants to experience success and some sort of recognition for their work and not everybody does so I was prepared for things to go either way. And then over the years I also started to enjoy a pretty good career as a backing singer, I sang on a lot of people's records and toured with some really great artists. So things were not so bad and I made a good living. I was disappointed to think I might not get a record deal but at the same time I felt grateful to be making a living and be working in the industry that I wanted to be in."

Why did you choose Nashville as a base?

"At the time I had a very small child and as a single parent I felt it was crucial for me to move to an industry town and to my mind there were only three choices — LA, Nashville or New York, and of the three Nashville was the least threatening. I felt I could do what I did anywhere and if it was good enough, sooner or later it would emerge and the right people would become aware of it and fortunately that happened."

"I think Nashville is experiencing something of a renaissance, it's primarily a country town and it always will be but I think there's a credibility here now for other types of music that maybe hasn't been there in the past and people regularly come to Nashville to check out what's happening in the live music scene. Frankly, it's a much nicer place than LA or NY to live and raise a family."

How important is the Christian component of your music?

"Well, for me, obviously it's an extraordinarily important event in my life. I don't know that I feel compelled to purposefully write songs about my faith just in order to have them on record. I don't know that I want to use the music as a medium to evangelise and I don't consider myself a gospel artist or a contemporary Christian artist, I consider myself a Christian and I consider myself a recording artist. And obviously the two touch on each other because I write about things that are important to me. My faith is certainly important but I think a lot of things are valid to write about."

So, if you like soulful, bluesy, gutsy female singers shooting straight from the heart, check out this thoughtful and undeniably powerful first record. It may not be my cup of meat, but it's got 'quality' stamped all over it.

DONNA YUZWALK

The Pop Thyng

World Gone Wild's first album is a mixture of pop melodies, dreamy atmospherics and dark haunting tones. Stanley Manthying and Michael Caulfield aren't afraid to say they are a pop band.

"We're trying to reach everyone with our music. It could be a thirteen year old kid and it could be a 35 year old man," says Stanley.

"New Zealand's too small a place to be underground. I know — I've been that," says Michael.

World Gone Wild started when Stanley and Michael were playing in a band called Big Explosion at the 1989 Battle of the Bands. Mike Chunn of Sony Records asked Stanley who had written two of the songs? Stanley and Michael. Immediately Big Explosion broke up



World Gone Wild (L-R) Mike Caulfield, Stanley Manthying.

and went their separate ways. Stanley was in a fusion band called Cactus and Michael was in a semi-alternative band called Dark Ages.

At the beginning of last year Michael and Stanley got back together writing songs. When Mike Chunn got wind of this he asked for a demo of a song he'd heard called 'Shy Shy Jenny'. The next thing a recording contract was signed.

'Shy Shy Jenny' was *World Gone Wild's* first single released a year ago, although the song was written four years previously.

"Lyrically," says Stanley, "the song is about a dream I had about my friend's life. In the dream I was at her funeral in a big gothic church. It's really strange because the song ended up sounding like the dream."

Michael creates the music and Stanley writes the lyrics.

"It's strange how I write. I really like imagery and if someone hears a lyric I like them to be able to picture something."

World Gone Wild's follow up single, 'Stand Back', went Top Ten in New Zealand two months ago and has just been released in Australia.

"On all the stuff we've recorded so far we've programmed the drums myself or the producer has. We've put in some live cymbals and stuff like that," says Michael.

"That's been one of the real down sides of it. Right from day one we've been looking for people. Now we've got a lineup that looks like it's

gonna work and we're gonna get out there and play live."

Stanley: "The performance on stage will be really professional, fun and groovy."

It was Tim Finn's suggestion to fly in Mike den Elzen, a producer from Australia, for the album.

Michael: "We like to have total input in recording. We are happy with the quality but having said that there are two or three songs that were changed by the producer which we weren't very happy about. We are actually re-recording 'Touch' as a new single."

The new version will be recorded with live bass instead of synthesised bass. Stanley says, "It will be a happening single, and it will be much more powerful."

When asked what makes *World Gone Wild* different to other local bands, Stanley says: "We write good songs. A lot of local bands just haven't got the songs."

Michael says "We do a certain kind of music and some of it might happen to be poppy and melodic. But you could imagine it being a single on the radio and that's why we got our record deal."

Stanley says, "Local bands shouldn't be afraid to be labelled pop. I've heard comments that Push used to be a heavy band but because they have a number one single jealous people say 'Oh bubble gum metal'. That really sucks, because good on them, I reckon."

RICHARD NEVITT

the FLY U2

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