

Q&A with... Estelle

words: Lou Jones

Estelle's sparky grooves, talent and chutzpah have already gained her a hat-trick of UK Hip Hop awards and a Mobo. Those same qualities soon got her noticed by the cream of American R'n'B when she hot-footed it to New York.

Since signing to John Legend's new record label she's worked with Kanye West, John Legend and Wyclef Jean amongst others. It's no surprise then that her 2008 album *Shine* spawned mega hit *American Boy*.

The West London diva was in the middle of a US tour and staying in San Francisco when we caught up with her on the transatlantic wire.

What's been your favourite live performance so far on this tour?

I did a show the other day in Vancouver on Labour Day. I was told it sold out ten minutes before I went on stage which was good. When I get up there the first song I sang was *So Much Things to Say* and they were singing the lyrics top to bottom. That continued it for the whole show. I had to say: "Oh ok, cool. Let me start on something you lot can sing with me". Insane! They knew the whole album. It was fantastic.

Have we lost you to America or are you coming back to the UK soon to show our other solo artists who's boss?

I don't even look at it like that – I do what I do. I don't compete with anyone. I never put myself in a position of who's better than who. I don't care about anyone per se, you know? I really worry about my fans and whether they're enjoying the show. I try to give the best show I can rather than go out there and worry about others.

Some UK media gives a lot of coverage to the image and social lives of music artists, or people who aren't really creative. What do you think about that?

I think it's insane. I honestly try to stay out of it! I totally get that it sells but I promise you that my private life is nothing to do with any other person and I really try to keep it that way. My private life is all in my music so if they really wanted to go in there they could, but I think that they just prefer the songs more than anything else.

You seem to have achieved so much off of your own back. Where do you get your confidence and self-belief from?

Just growing up, just my life. I know what I've been through and I know what I don't want to go through it again so I feel like, "ain't nothing to it but to do it". That's kind of my motto – just do it.

You've previously talked about inspirations like Mary J Blige and Dinah Washington. What about Chaka Khan?

She's the queen! People always say that big girls can always sing but she was skinny as hell, hitting notes that no-one knew the hell about. That's the common thing. Her voice was so powerful, she was so fresh. I read her autobiography and her whole vibe was so free living, so San Francisco you know? And such a diva in the same breath. I love it.

You're in San Francisco at the moment – have you had time to explore or have you been there before?

I've been here before. I love the sea and I'm based near Golden Gate Bridge so I'm right by the water and San Francisco Bay. It's the only sea that has mist and fog in blazing sunshine. It's beautiful.

"I know what I've been through and I know what I don't want to go through again..."

You grew up in West London and you've moved to New York – has the big apple lived up to your expectations?

Well, I'd been there so many times so, apart from moving, it's kind of like London with a different accent. Like I knew where I was going, I knew what I was doing. There are a couple of things you miss because you just miss it you know? But it becomes less of a tourist thing now because I've lived there.

Any places you recommend to go to in New York for music?

Everyone that comes to New York on a Sunday night goes to the Village Underground because it's like the equivalent of Pigalle on a Monday night in London. There's always a live band and people can just get up and sing. There's a good few clubs, a good few places – it's the Lower East Side now and the Meatpacking District. Once you hit the Meatpacking District there's everything. You can't miss it, you just walk into stuff. There's a million people at any given time floating around.

Have you got a scary ten year plan or are you just living for the moment?

Oh no, like in the middle of all of this I figured you have to have a plan. I definitely have



a plan of what I want to do and it includes world domination! [Laughs]. There are many things I'm going to do outside of music and I'm pretty excited about them. Some of them involve charity work and some are my personal business. So just want to expand and make them something I can do every day outside of music.

If you got a week off what would you do with it?

Sleep and cook – that's all I would do. Cooking actually relaxes me – I used to hate it when I was younger and my mum used to always make us do it. She actually taught us how to cook. I'm on the road a lot and always trying to find people to actually come and eat. [Laughs].

What's your cooking speciality?

You know what I made the other day that was really cool? I made a full roast dinner – like roast potatoes, carrots... I did everything and we were all sitting there going crazy, losing our minds, saying: "Oh my god it's roast chicken!"

Has John Legend enjoyed any of your cooking?

Oh, he's had some of my jerk chicken. **E**

Estelle's album Shine is out now



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