



Getting To Know Naeemah

by Markus

Photo: Cynthia Wilson

I remember one of my first Tuesday Night's at the Grape for the Fat City Acoustic Night. I had just gotten a beer from Eddie the bartender and was waiting for my friends, Soraia, to take the stage when Naeemah started to perform. When this woman's voice filled the room, my head turned right away to see who was on stage. For two days after her performance I tried to find out more about this person. Two weeks later, I was back for another Fat City Tuesday Night and Naeemah performed again. She was as good or better the second time around.

The third time I saw her, I sat with Lexi Greene and Michael Zimney of the band Head. We were all watching and enjoying her music when Michael pointed out some very interesting observations about her style, comparing the way Naeemah plays and sings to Prince and Lenny Kravitz meeting Tracy Bonham. Her vocals don't follow the guitar rhythms; it's as if she's ambidextrous. Lenny and Prince are able to play that way extremely effortlessly. Go back and listen to your Prince, Lenny and Tracey Bonham CD's to hear the ambidextrous style in which she plays and performs. I also noticed that Naeemah has an edge to her similar to that of Chris Cornell when he plays songs like "Sunshower", "Can't Change Me"



and "Like Suicide" (acoustic). Not surprising, considering one of this artist's favorites is the Chris Cornell/Soundgarden tandem because of their music and Chris's remarkable songwriting ability.

The woman I am referring to is singer/songwriter Naeemah Maddox. Born and raised in Philly and a graduate of The Philadelphia High School for Girls and Temple University, she is very familiar with the music of the area. Her father is a jazz musician and guitar teacher, so there was always music on at the Maddox home. Music like Motown, Jazz,

Led Zeppelin and The Beatles were some of Naeemah's early favorites. Naeemah started out playing violin and flute and then picked up the guitar in her teens. Having a Jazz musician/guitar teacher for a father made this transition very easy, and her first guitar was a little Red Horner. Naeemah is a very interesting and intelligent person and a blast to chat with. Here is a little about Naeemah, according to Naeemah.

Markus: Was there a moment as a child that impacted you musically?

Naeemah: I don't think there was one specific incident. But, one of the

earliest videos of me that my parents have is them playing Billie Jean and me wearing this little hat singing 'Billie Jean is that my love.' Then, someone takes the hat away from me and I start crying. They give me the hat and I keep singing. Also, my dad plays guitar; he's a jazz musician, so I've always had music around. My parents used to videotape me and my sister doing this thing we had called Funhouse. It was me and my sister doing improv. Even when I look at the old tapes now, I can tell that I was making up songs on the spot.

What was the first concert you went to?

My dad took me to see Miles Davis right before he died. I was eight years old. I don't remember much. It was at, like, the Dell East. I don't know where that is. The stage was spinning and I remember the neon. That's all I remember because I was so young, but, at least I can say I saw Miles Davis.

Was there a moment in your life when your music listening habits changed quite drastically?

I was listening to the radio during spring break of maybe 9th grade. I was fed up with R&B music because all it did was repeat the same chords over and over. I was so bored. Then I was listening the radio and flipping through the stations and I heard Alanis Morissette's song "You Oughta Know" and I was like 'whoa this chick is angry.' All I did was watch MTV for two weeks and I remember The Chili Peppers had the video Aeroplane. I was so mesmerized and changed my radio station to rock. I was never really a fan of grunge and it was something new to me. It's what sparked my want and need to write.

When your listening habits changed, was there a song that really stood out to you?

Soundgarden's Black Hole Sun, STP, AIC, still stuck in the grunge phase. I was a huge Smashing Pumpkins fan.

How old were you when you picked up the guitar for the first time?

I was 15 years old.

When you first started playing guitar, did you play all the time?

I was always in my room trying to figure out songs. Because I knew a lot about theory and I played the flute and violin, it was easy for me to teach myself. My dad definitely taught me almost everything I know. Because of my father, I wasn't starting from scratch.

When you are writing music, do you let everyday life influence your music? Things you read, things you see on TV, friends?

I think the things that influence most of my songs are definitely my emotions, and I guess the interactions I have with people. I'm a very non-confrontational person and a very understanding and empathetic person, so I definitely get hurt a lot more than a regular person. My friend thinks I'm passive-aggressive. Instead of yelling at that person, I write a song about it because, in a way, I can represent my angry feelings. In real life though, I do understand that people do make mistakes. If someone does something bad to me I feel that I have to forgive them. I like to give people a second chance.

"Jump At The Chance," is that about somebody you really like?

Actually, it's about this musician that I know, and it's funny because I feel like it's the only love song that I have in me. It's a positive love song because when I met that person, he inspired me so much. He is such a

great person and great musician. He doesn't know the song is about him, but he definitely knows that I liked him.

What's the story behind "My Friend"?

I dated this guy in college. I guess he was my first boyfriend, and I dated him twice. We dated, he broke my heart, it took me two years to get over him then we got back together and he broke my heart...I drink Ginger Ale when I go to a bar.

What do you write about?

(Laughing) I can definitely say that writing Heartbreak songs is my specialty. There are two ways to say 'I love you' and two million ways to say 'I hate you, you screwed me over'. Before I experienced it first hand, I'd always been drawn to darker music. I'm a very happy person, but I like darker music and darker concepts. But I do want to open myself up more to writing about different topics because it will help me grow as an artist. I really want to expand my lyric writing.

Drinking hot tea with Naeemah and chatting about everything from music to life was an absolute blast. She is very real, sincere, intelligent, honest and talented. To sample her music, check her mySpace page out at www.myspace.com/naeemahrocks. You should also check out her website, www.naeemahrocks.com. But what'll put you over the top is to see her live. Watching her mesmerize a room is fun, and her CD is a great listen.

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