

In Conversation – Ingrid D. Johnson, Part I

November 23, 2012

[Wanda Waterman](#)

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Ingrid D. Johnson is a Winnipeg-based singer-songwriter with a deeply soulful rhythm-and-blues feel that evokes the girl pop singers of the early '60s. With her band The Funky Fresh Crew, she released her debut full-length album *What About Love?* on October 9.

A Jamaican who came to Canada with her family at the age of four, Ingrid's contribution to her new country has been commendatory. Past work with the Canadian Red Cross, the Respected Violence and Abuse Prevention program, Voices Manitoba Youth In Care Network, UNICEF, and finally her work as the spokesperson for the clients of the Laurel Center (a community resource centre that counsels sexually abused women with addictions) has allowed her to respond to the pain of her own past in a healing way. In The Closet Productions (*A Voice for The Voiceless?*) further promotes her mission to create music and art for positive social change.

Recently, Ingrid took the time to answer some of Wanda Waterman's questions about how art and social activism helped her cope with her difficult past.

Feeling Ugly

My childhood was riddled with abuse. Two different men sexually abused me before my 13th

birthday. I never knew my father. I witnessed moments of violence in my home and I also endured emotional, verbal, and physical abuse. I was bullied in elementary school and always felt awkward, unloved, and unwanted.

I spent a lot of time alone. I felt ugly and was always afraid of getting into trouble. I also had some good memories, like being in a school play, singing in church and school choir, making up songs in my bedroom, writing my first poems, loving Michael Jackson, taking dance lessons, running and winning a long distance track and field race, etc.

Early Visions of Glory

I grew up in Winnipeg, after having moved from Jamaica at the age of four. When we first moved to Canada we lived with my grandmother on McGee Street. Then we moved to Ellice Ave., Edison Ave., Burrows Ave., and Polson Ave.

Then I went into foster care and moved around some more.

I listened to music all the time. I loved dancing and making up my own songs. I wrote poetry, sang in choirs, and also took band, but never had the discipline to stick to any instrument. However, I always had this vision in my head of flying like an eagle and dancing under a spotlight on stage. I always felt like I was meant to do something special? I just didn't know what that would be or when I would do it.

Speaking for Those Who can't Speak for Themselves

When I was a child in foster care, I had foster parents who seemed to love the money they got for taking care of us more than they loved taking care of us. They bought themselves and their kids new clothes and other things and took us foster kids to Value Village for our clothes. So I stood up for my foster sisters and myself by telling my social worker.

After that we got our clothing allowance directly from our social workers in cash. My foster mother didn't like that, and pegged me as a troublemaker. I was a child she was glad to get rid of when it was time for me to move to a group home. Shortly after that, this family stopped taking in foster children.

The Blessing of Good Teachers

My most beneficial educational experience has been with my two vocal coaches. One is from Winnipeg and the other from New York City. They work together to teach me in a way that I can understand. they're always asking me what things feel like to me when they ask me to do a vocal exercise. Then they use my feedback to communicate to me any changes I need to make in my vocal technique.

They celebrate my strengths and are sensitive to my weaknesses as a singer by giving me

techniques I can understand to help me fix the problem. They never make me feel like a hopeless failure. I love that. It makes learning so much more fun and fruitful!

Incredible Experiences

The most mesmerizing musical experience of my life was listening to my complete album and realizing how much God had blessed me and my five musicians. It also confirmed to me that as a singer-songwriter I could create powerful music with an inspiring message to uplift others.

To be continued . . .

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