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By mindyourmind volunteer, Jessica, age 22. 14/12/2012



Ingrid D. Johnson (<http://www.intheclosetproductions.com/>), a Winnipeg-based singer-songwriter with a versatile musical background, along with her band 'The Funky Fresh Crew', recently released ***What About Love?***, her debut full-length album, fused with elements of jazz, pop, blues, gospel and R&B.

Having been the victim of childhood sexual abuse, Ingrid is now a strong advocate that raises awareness around these issues and violence against women. She has worked with The Canadian Red Cross RespectED: Violence and Abuse Prevention program, Voices Manitoba Youth In Care Network, UNICEF and finally as the spokesperson for the clients of The Laurel Center (a community resource center that counsels sexually abused women with addictions).

In our interview, Ingrid defines the difference between surviving her past trauma and overcoming it. She talks about the difficulties she faced, as a result of the sexual abuse she experienced, and what helped her through her dark times. Through her music, poetry, spoken word, art and advocacy work, she finds healing...

Can you tell us a bit about your new album "What about love?", and the meaning behind the title?

"What About Love?" is an album that asks a question ... "What about Love?" What about showing love and respect in all our relationships, business and personal? What about treating others as we would like to be treated? Caring about others as much as we care about ourselves? What if we showed love by helping each other and truly honoring each other by listening to each other deeply, empathetically. What About Love? is an album that documents, explores, and celebrates all the lessons I learned, thus far, in my quest to find and maintain healthy, respectful, and loving relationships. It is my poetic and musical story about searching for true unconditional love and finding it, by reclaiming my shattered faith in God (after years of suffering from the impact of childhood sexual abuse). It is a social commentary on the social impact of omitting love, wisdom, and mercy from any of our relationships, as human beings. In addition, it is also an album that looks at various forms of relationships and the things that create a healthy relationship and things that cause unhealthy ones.

What are some of your musical (and non-musical) inspirations and why?

Some of my musical inspirations are; Billie Holiday, Edith Piaf, Adele, Ray Charles, Etta James, Sade, Lauryn Hill, Whitney Houston, Amel Larrieux, Jill Scott, Feist, and Michael Jackson. In addition to these, the vocal performances of some legendary, musical actresses like Rita Hayworth and Dorothy Dandridge. My non-musical inspiration comes from The Bible, various indie films, socially conscious documentaries, the 1920's & 1930's cinema era, and great poets like E.E Cummings, Maya Angelou, bp NICHOL, and William Shakespeare. Why? Because they all resonate with me as unique artists. They all have a real, life, story filled with pain, struggle, loss and some great success, behind their public images, and I can feel the essence of their own life stories coming through in their craft. That is what inspires me.

"What about Love?" features a variety of music genres (such as jazz, pop, blues, gospel and R&B), what is your favorite genre of music to sing/perform?

My favorite genre of music to sing/perform is Jazz because it is the genre that suits my voice the best.

The album is described as that which 'ministers to the heart and soul', how else do you hope your music will affect your fans?

I hope my music will inspire people to never lose faith in true, unconditional, love that helps one to overcome adversity and to walk in love towards others in all their relationships.

Which of your songs speaks to you the most?

"Come Back"

You have been creating and publishing poetry, music, spoken word and videos to spread the message of overcoming violence against women and childhood sexual abuse. Which of these forms of art do you find to be the most effective in getting the message across to people?

Before I became a singer/songwriter, my poetry and spoken word was the most powerful medium for me to share my story and get the word out. However, since I started songwriting and singing, I am able to reach out to a more diverse audience because music is so universal.

From your interview with Stylus magazine, and on your YouTube page, I've read that you have dealt with experiences of childhood sexual abuse and that it is because of your deep Christian faith that you were able to be so open about these experiences. What would you suggest to someone who does not have a religious faith, to help them begin a process of opening up or recovery from a traumatic experience?

I would suggest that they begin the process of opening up or recovering from a trauma with someone that they trust (for emotional support) and in an environment they feel safe, being vulnerable. Talking about it is the first step.

You have been quoted as saying, "Inspire those wounded by childhood sexual abuse and other forms of trauma... to do more than just survive their past — to overcome it!". How would you describe the difference between surviving past trauma and overcoming it?

Surviving your past is different from overcoming it because when I was just surviving ... I did very unhealthy things; like smoke, drink, jump from romantic relationship to relationship, self-medicate ETC ... just to cope with the trauma from my past. I was always just trying to get through my life and never really living and enjoying my life. I was afraid all the time and I lived based on my emotions, which led to bad choices in everything. I also felt numb inside a lot and when I wasn't numb, I felt depressed. I wanted to die. Life was a burden. I had no joy - no peace. No one understood me and I hated being in the world. I always felt a strong sense of injustice and rage, all the time. For me, overcoming has meant having hope and placing all of my faith in Jesus Christ. It means having a relationship with God that fills me up with love, peace, wisdom, and a strong sense of security ... no matter what may be happening in my life. It means having love and respect for God, others, and also myself. It means showing compassion to people who are hurting and broken hearted ... because I know what it is like. I know what it is like to struggle with suicide. I know what it is like to feel like you are going crazy. I know what it is like to thirst and crave for true love and understanding. I know what it is like to be rejected and betrayed. I know what it is like to be used and abused. I also know what it is like to be hated. I know what it is like to be manipulated and misled by others ... and that makes me empathetic to people everywhere who are hurting and longing to be loved. Overcoming my past means showing love towards others, choosing (everyday) to forgive those who have hurt me, choosing to set healthy boundaries, make good choices, and doing what I can to help others that are struggling to overcome trauma. That for me means honestly sharing my story, music, and art. Hoping that my story will help to inspire others to open up about their own stories and start the journey towards healing, as well.

Can you tell us about what helped you to overcome the trauma that you experienced as a result of childhood sexual abuse? What advice would you give to someone who is struggling with a current or past traumatic experience?

Going through therapy helped me to sort out my feelings and recognize my hurtful patterns. Having my faith helped me to break those patterns and make wiser choices. The advice I would give to someone who is struggling with a current or past trauma is this ... don't be silent. Don't bury it. Face it head on and deal with the impact now. Don't let the impact create unhealthy coping patterns that can ruin the rest of your life. Don't give up. You are loved.

In addition to raising awareness about abuse and violence against women through your music and art, you're heavily involved with many organizations such as The Canadian Red Cross RespectED, UNICEF, Violence and Abuse Prevention programs, and of course your own company The Closet Productions- "A Voice for The Voiceless". What do you find to be the most rewarding thing from your involvement with these organizations?

What I love the most about performing and doing my spoken word at fundraisers, galas, concerts, and conventions for organizations like; The Canadian Red Cross REspectED program, The Laurel Center, UNICEF, and my own Company In The Closet Productions that creates music and art for positive, social change is that I get to give back to others using my creative gifts. I get to share my story about learning to overcome childhood sexual abuse which helps me to make even more sense of the pain I went through. I get to reach out to other people wounded by the same things I went through and tell them that they are not alone and that they are loved. I get to inspire others to wake up, stand up, speak out and to use their voice and no longer be silent. I get to be "a voice for the voiceless", an advocate for those who can't speak for themselves. Something I have always done ever since I was 12 years old and I still believe in doing with my whole heart, as an artist, now and always.

What do you do to relieve yourself from stress?

I turn to my faith, exercise prayer, and I also spend time with my soul mate, Marty. We love to laugh and have fun together! He is my best friend and fiancée.

And last but not least, what is a fun fact about you and your band, The Funky Fresh Crew?

I met my guitarist, Frank Rizzuto, playing his heart out at a local fundraiser for non-violence in July 2009. At the time, I really needed a band to help me promote my prior project, "Wounded Soul" Vol 1&2 (a Pop, R&B, Hip-Hop and Spoken word compilation CD with a poetry book of my original songs performed by various Winnipeg vocalists) but I did not know how to put a band together. So, I took a leap of faith and approached Frank to ask for his help. He agreed and brought 4 other talented musicians into my life. We have been working together as a band for 3 years and 3 months now. This is our first album together and my first complete album, as a singer/songwriter. We had so much fun making this album together and I truly hope and pray that we get to tour with this album and make many more albums, together, as a band.

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