

OCTOBER 4, 2012 BY STAFF

Ingrid D. Johnson :: Art for Hope

By Darcy Penner

For over half a decade, Ingrid D. Johnson has been creating and publishing poetry, music, spoken word, and videos, all with the purpose of sharing a positive message of overcoming childhood sexual abuse and violence against women. Johnson founded her own publication social enterprise, [In The Closet Productions](#), to further her work and “inspire those wounded by childhood sexual abuse and other forms of trauma... to do more than just survive their past — to overcome it!” Her career has included many successes, from wide exposure throughout provincial and national media, to partnering with many community organizations, to being included in The Manitoba Women’s Advisory Council and Mentoring Artist’s for Women’s Art’s publication, *Women In the Arts: Artists Working for Social Change*.

On Sunday, October 7th, Johnson will be celebrating the release of her debut full length, *What About Love?*, at The Park Theatre Cafe. Recorded at Studio 11 by Jason Gordon, Johnson is joined by her backup band, [The Funky Fresh Crew](#), to create a heart-filled blend of gospel, blues, and pop. Johnson took the time this week to answer a few questions for *Stylus*.

Head down to the Park on Sunday night to see Johnson’s set: doors at 7:15, tickets \$15 advance/\$20 at the door (includes CD).

[Ingrid D. Johnson – Come Back](#)

Stylus: As an artist, you work in multiple mediums, including music, spoken word, and poetry. How does working within and publishing in different mediums benefit your art

and your message?

Ingrid D. Johnson: Publishing in different mediums allows me to share my thoughts, feelings, concerns and ideas with a more diverse audience. This is especially true with the medium of music because music is such a fun, creative, influential and universal medium for expressing important ideas, attitudes, thoughts, and feelings. It is also the medium that I find the most challenging (in a positive way) and the most rewarding because it is the medium that challenges me to learn more and to grow more, as a developing singer/songwriter.

Stylus: Can you elaborate on the writing process for the songs on this album?

Johnson: The writing process went something like this for my debut singer/songwriter album “What About Love?”.

Step one: I like to start with a clear understanding of everything and everyone’s part before I start working with anyone in the creative process.

Step two: After that, I sang my original songs (lyrics and melody) with a clear idea of what I expect for my songs to sound like to my band of 5 musicians.

Step three: We worked together to come up with the right style and mood of music to match my lyrics, melody, and unique voice.

Step four: I amend my lyrics, melody, or the phrasing to make my original song work with the music they created, without sacrificing the heart and soul of the message or story I am trying to express in my song.

Step five: My band arranges the music, charts the music, and adds any embellishments needed to enhance the feel/mood of the songs. Then, we practise it together and record it at the studio.

Step six: We listen to the recording several times and make corrections to the song before the final mix.

Step seven: We sit with the studio engineer and fine tune all the instruments and make sure they blend well with vocal tracks and add little ornaments to complete the overall listening experience before mastering the songs. That’s the process.

Stylus: Your work is extremely honest and open about your past, life journey, and personal struggles. Where do you find the courage to be so public with issues such as childhood sexual abuse?

Johnson: To be honest the courage and strength to be so open and honest about my life, in my work, comes from my deep Christian faith.

Stylus: How do you understand the power of art to heal and overcome?

Johnson: I believe art was created as a tool to help people to work through emotions that are hard to deal with. It helps you to express yourself more clearly, which helps you to come to a deeper understanding of yourself, the world around you, and sometimes even others around you. It is a powerful tool to use in the healing process but not the source of healing itself.

Stylus: Some of your past work has commented on the contrast between the media's perception of womanhood and the reality of the female experience (notably "The Real Woman," 2006). How do you think this distortion affects our relationships, and the daily experience of both women and men? How do you think your work rejects this distortion? What type of tangible evidence do you look for that feminist voices are succeeding in resisting the norms imposed by a traditionally-sexist mass media?

Johnson: I believe the women being portrayed in the media today are still different from everyday women, although there have been some improvements. I see these improvements in block buster movies where leading actresses are looking more real and less like fantasy. However, I still believe we have a ways to go in portraying positive, female role models in media, music and entertainment. Mainly because, the media today still focus heavily on the ascetics of being a woman and abusing ones sexuality, which only confuses and misleads a lot of young girls and even adult women into overly promoting their sexuality, instead of honouring who they are as a whole person. This of course impacts how women and men see and relate to each other in our every day world.

With that said, I believe my work rejects this distortion of womanhood by revealing the humanity in being a woman (IE: In the "Real Woman video" I show women speaking about their insecurities, a woman (me) doing everyday things like using the bathroom, and I speak about being an imperfect woman). In fact, in my art, the fantasy woman is the awkward, uncomfortable image and the real woman is the woman that does not need to be dressed up in order to be celebrated for her unique and beautiful spirit.

Stylus: In The Closet, the production company you founded and are CEO of, is based on "strong Christian Values," and you reference your faith as a major source of strength. How does your faith influence your art and your social enterprise?

Johnson: My faith influences my art and enterprise in this way, I try my best to do everything in a respectful and loving way. I try to treat others as I would like to be treated. I try to create my music and art that is honest, offers positive messages that teaches good values, and I do my best to run my business with integrity.

Stylus: Given the value you attribute to faith for healing, what are the implications for a healing process of someone with no religious faith?

Johnson: I think that healing happens on several levels. Physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual. I believe everything begins in the spiritual and manifests itself in the psychological, emotional and physical aspects of a persons being. To deal with everything on the physical, psychological or emotional level only, while neglecting the spiritual, I believe is a temporary fix. Eventually, you will have to go deeper to a place beyond human reasoning ... to the spirit of the problem in order to completely heal and eventually overcome the problem. After all, we are more than just human beings, we are spiritual beings. Meaning we have a spirit. That is what I think and believe.

Stylus: In The Closet has released lots of your work, including two collections of your poetry, a compilation album you performed on and curated, multiple music videos, and now your debut full length, *What About Love?* How do you strike a balance between your art and your social enterprise? Does your art career have an existence and trajectory to itself independent of In The Closet?

Johnson: In The Closet Productions was created as a platform for me to share my story of learning to overcome the impact of childhood sexual abuse through various forms of art, and to share other stories about various social issues. It is my legacy – my life's work that I hope to leave behind. It's mission anchors me to a solid purpose for my creativity while it's vision helps me to always consider sharing the stories of others who can not speak up for themselves.

In The Closet Productions mission reminds me (as an artist) that when I am making music and art that I always have a social and spiritual responsibility to my audience. It reminds me that I am not just making art for art sake. I am making art and music to address important social issues, to offer hope, to inspire, to help and not to hurt others for selfish gain. And although I had an emerging art career before my company was founded, without my company's mission and vision I would have no vision and no sense of direction as an artist.

So, no, my art is not separate from my company's mission and vision ... they are intertwined and they always will be. They exist together harmoniously because my life influences my art and hopefully echoes the lives of others in need of hope and inspiration in order to overcome adversity.

Stylus: What are your goals for this album, and how it will affect your career?

Johnson: The goals for my album are also goals that help to promote me as an artist and also achieve my company's mission and vision. Achieving these goals with this album would not only establish me as a successful, nationally and internationally, recognized artist but it would also make In The Closet Productions a prosperous socially and spiritually conscious music, entertainment and production company.

Stylus: What are your plans after the release show?

Johnson: The plan after my CD release party is to keep working, diligently, on improving my music and my art by training, practising, and performing. In addition to diligently working on achieving those business goals, listed above, by looking, asking, and applying for more opportunities to promote my music, my art, my story, and my company's mission / vision.

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