

Q&A



ANGIE STONE

A soul songstress' new music embraces her past and the present

ANGIE STONE'S LATEST ALBUM, *Unexpected*, lives up to its title. She departs from the bread-and-butter traditional soul that has characterized her career over the last decade, returning to the flavor of her pre-solo groups: the '80s funky hip-hop of the Sequence and the '90s dance and R&B of Vertical Hold. "I stepped out of the norm of singing songs that cater to the neo-soul ticket," she says. "Everybody's expecting that. I took a chance on encompassing my entire career up to this point." The Atlanta resident took time during a recent visit to New York to talk about the evolution of her brand of sweet soul music.

It was surprising to hear Auto-Tune on "Tell Me." Why did you do that?

I love T-Pain, and it was just paying homage to him. I think people get a bum rap when they go outside of the box. Why kill the dream of someone that picked up that torch and ran with it? You have to allow people to be clever and creative. I heard a lot of people comment, "Oh he's only using that because he can't sing." Well I did it, and I can sing.

Where did you record the album?

I started out in Marvin Gaye's studio [Marvin's Room] on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles, and I ended up in a little studio down in

Atlanta [M Studio], and stayed there. I did preproduction in other little studios that were owned by some of the producers, but that place helped me to finish the album in a good space.

Your father died while you were making *Unexpected*. What impact did that have on the album?

It pushed me a little harder. The industry has been so jaded lately, with everybody like crabs in a barrel trying to stick to the top. So when my father passed away, it gave me a whole other purpose to work hard. I actually went in and re-recorded the vocals to quite a few songs, because after my father passed I had a little bit more energy and adrenaline to go in and approach the songs from another area.

You've been making music for three decades now. How have the changes in technology influenced your creativity?

It really hasn't had an effect on my creativity. They found a faster way to cut, which in my opinion is like racing to the finish line. The result is super-fast songs and super-fast lyrics and super-fast energy. In earlier days it was a slow brew. The song grew as a result of the creation of it together. Back in

the day you took your time and you created a masterpiece. That's why they're called standards! I still want that authenticity and that slow brew sometimes. As a matter of fact, two days ago I got this sudden urge. I don't know why, but I felt like I wanted to do something in the [classic soul] mood of *Black Diamond* [1999] and *Mahogany Soul* [2001]. I told one of my managers, "Get me an '87 Fender Rhodes and call the studio to see if next week is available." I just want to go in and shut all the doors and create an awesome, awesome soul album. I don't know where that urge came from, but that's where I want to go next.

How do you think you fit in today's musical landscape?

I honestly don't believe in "Where do you fit in?" I have my fan base, like Rihanna has her fan base, like Beyoncé has her fan base, like Toni Braxton has hers, like Sade has hers. What you're asking me is, "How do you think you compare with the likes of these 15- and 16-year-olds?" My thing is, I don't compare. I'm different, I stand in a class of my own. There are adults in the world. This whole world is not made of children. There has to be someone who is a keeper of that flame, and I'd like to be that person.

—Richard Cromelin

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