

SHARON JONES: SOUL SURVIVOR

Even though Sharon Jones has led the recent soul-and-funk resurgence (releasing her first album in 2002 at age 46), she brings an authenticity her younger, more mainstream contemporaries like Amy Winehouse and Joss Stone can't compete with—they discovered the music while she lived it. Jones' latest album, *100 Days, 100 Nights*, offers more infectious 1960s throwbacks and again pairs her with The Dap-Kings (who've been busy as the musical powerhouse behind Winehouse's recent album).

With Jones' delivery there's an emotive reverence for soul music—a genre instrumental in showcasing black culture to the broader public during the civil-rights movement. “I was here in the '60s when they had the riots in New York, with Martin Luther King, with Kennedy,” she says about her adolescence in Brooklyn. And of her birthplace in Augusta, Ga., she remembers, “I was in the schools down South when they didn't want us to go. Little black kids were being chased and beaten. I've been through it all.”

Unfortunately, these childhood trials were followed by Jones' struggle to be taken seriously in the music industry. During the flamboyant and frivolous '70s, svelte figures and light skin (a la Diana Ross and Donna Summer) were de rigeur for many black women seeking recording careers. “What discouraged me,” Jones admits, “was when I was writing stuff ... and I had this idea for music; I'd start a group and then someone [would] come up and tell [me] ‘You don't have the look, you need to go and bleach your skin, you're too dark-skinned, you're too short.’ But, meanwhile, in the back, I've got the voice.” Frustrated, she left her dream



behind and retreated to singing for God in church and even pulled a stint as a New York corrections officer.

But once she formed a musical partnership with Dap-Kings bandleader Bosco Mann a decade ago, and people got wind of her explosive stage presence, Jones would eventually get her due. “God gave me a gift and one of these days people are going to accept me for who I am—my dark-skinness, my shortness and my oldness,” she says assuredly. “And that's what happened. I look at this now as my blessing—it's my time.” *Cory Albertson*