

“I’m an artist, I can’t begin to say why” The Simple Truth with Holly Palmer

Holly who?

Holly Palmer! Born and raised in Southern California and Seattle, the young Holly Palmer grew up listening to her father’s music. He loved The Beatles’ *Rubber Soul* and The Rolling Stones’ *Big Hits (High Tide and Green Grass)*, and walked around playing Neil Young’s *A Horse with No Name* on his guitar. Holly was also influenced by Aretha Franklin, Rickie Lee Jones and Sarah Vaughn.

She attended the Berklee College of Music in Boston. “I went to Berklee because I had a friend who was from the same Seattle area as me, and he was at the Boston Conservatory studying the trumpet. I went to visit him and loved all the different kinds of music I was hearing. The next year I went to Berklee and started playing with some of those people.”

In 1996 her self-titled debut album was released on Reprise Records, which is a part of the bigger Warner Bros. Her second (*Tenderhooks*, 2003) and third album (*I Confess*, 2004) were released on her own label, Bombshell Records. Her latest album is called *Songs For Tuesday*, and will be released on Mercy Records, a new independent label.

Haven’t I heard that voice before?

You might have. Holly has appeared on different movie and TV series soundtracks, including *Party of Five*, *Forces of Nature*, *Into the blue* and *Down with love*, the latter starring Renee Zellweger and Ewan McGregor.

She also was a background singer for David Bowie, accompanying him on his world tour and appearing on his 1999 album *Hours*. More recently, she was on backing vowels for Gnarl’s *Barley’s Crazy*.

Yet we don’t know her. Why?

Well, the problem with being a background singer is that the audience does not see an independent artist, unless they do shows of their own. Luckily, Holly does perform solo. She opened for The Kooks in Rotown, Rotterdam in June, and that is where I got a chance to talk to her after the show.

Sounds like what now?

Holly’s music can best be defined by two words: Love and Feeling.

“I use my guitar as a foundation for the voice,”



she explains. Her latest album is a live album which was recorded in front of an audience in the studio. The reason she did this was to get the vibe between the live band, the audience and herself going. Her recent marriage has also had a profound influence on her last album’s lyrics; they all elaborate on Love. Evidently, she has found love and has conveniently shaped it into beautiful songs for us to enjoy.

Lemme mix that!

There are some unusual collaborations on her third record *I Confess*, including two songs by world famous producer Dr. Dre. Not an obvious choice, so how did this come about? Holly: “The guy who was producing my album with me was giving Dre piano and arranging lessons. So he played Dre some stuff one day and he was like “Dude, d’you wanna work on it?” And Dre was like: “Lemme mix that!” So he mixed one song and then he said: “Lemme do another one!” And so he did.”

So why did Warner Bros. back out of releasing her records?

After having released her debut record, Warner



did not put much effort in promoting her second album. "They were asking me for more singles on my last album and I said 'there's fucking five singles on this album [*I Confess*, red.] already!' When I first delivered the album, Warner didn't think that I needed more singles. It was evident to me at that time that the label and I were not aligned in the business practices and goals. But it is easier for them to say 'OK, write more singles' than to spend money on exposing the singles that are already on the album. But that doesn't feed an artist. That makes an artist whither and crumble. *I'm an artist, I can't begin to say why.* I'm only interested in writing more songs. And it's hard to write songs when you're trying to justify a withdrawal of your record label." Eventually, she decided it was better for her to control her own work and parted amicably with the label. That is when she created her own label, Bombshell Records and released both *Tenderhooks* as well as *I Confess*.

Is she bitter that Warner rejected her album?

"It's actually pretty cool. I was trying to be part of a corporate business model. I was with Warner because I believed they were going to expose me to an engaged audience." But the truth was she was always waiting for something to happen. "There are so many mouths to feed in that structure that it's *not* about 'I write a song, somebody likes it, they buy it'. The simplicity of that gets totally distorted and turns into this big beast."

Putting her music out there

Next to performing solo, Holly uses the Internet, especially MySpace, to get people acquainted with her music. "The internet makes everything so much easier. Before, artists had to send press kits to every magazine and hope that they would write about it. It's pretty expensive to do that. I love Myspace because it connects people up in a really fast, really personal way. I write songs: maybe it's a good song, maybe it's a crap song, but if someone likes it, it has value. They pay money: they either buy the song or they buy a ticket to the show. They get a song, I pay my rent. It's as simple as that. By using MySpace, I get confirmation every day that this is exactly how it works."

Gnarls Barkley Project

Her latest record, *Songs for Tuesday*, was produced by Justin Meldal-Johnsen. After finishing the album, he called her to participate on a project of his and fellow producer Brian Burton, a.k.a. Danger Mouse. This project is Gnarls Barkley, whose single *Crazy* is a massive hit all over the

world. The success of Gnarls Barkley is hardly surprising: all band members have an impressive track record. Holly is on backing vocals together with a solo artist who also opened for Mary J. Blige. The drummer has played with Nine Inch Nails and Marilyn Manson, the bass player has worked with Remy Zero, and last but not least, Gnarls has a brilliant keyboard wizard named Zach. Gnarls' star is rising rapidly, with *Crazy* currently being covered by many bands, including The Kooks, Nelly Furtado, The Raconteurs and The Zutons. All covers have been performed on BBC 1's Radio Live Lounge.

Hammy Palmer

"You probably didn't get a chance to see this, but backstage at Rotown, bands have written stuff all over the walls. It's pretty common, but this room was funny, because we're all sitting there, talking to each other, and one by one we noticed that everything on the walls has to do with ham. They've changed every band name to have something to do with ham. Like, Motörham, The Artist Formerly Known As Ham, Jimmy Hamricks, The White Hams. Over the years, every band has done that." We tried to think of some names, and came up with Holly Palham or Hammy Palmer. But she hasn't written on the walls just yet. "I was just taking it all in. It was a highlight," she says smiling.

Stroopwafels and Hagelslag

To show gratitude for an interview at such short notice, Holly got some traditional Dutch food: stroopwafels and hagelslag. "Oooh, chocolate sprinkles! And what's that, something with honey?" An explanation of our typical Dutch treats followed and Holly was delighted with the gifts. While I was writing this interview I received an e-mail from her that she and her husband greatly enjoyed all of it.

Find out more about Holly, tour dates and listen to some of her songs on:

www.myspace.com/hollypalmer

www.hollypalmer.com

Buy Holly Palmer albums at www.CDBaby.com

Find out more about Gnarls Barkley, tour dates and listen to songs on:

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By Judith Laanen