

CATCH OUR RIISING STAR

YahZarah



In this vast and mysterious universe, there are fiery yellow suns, glowing white moons and scarlet red planets. However, there's a *new* star that has appeared in the scope of the music industry's telescope. This particular star shines brighter than neighboring stars in its constellation. Astronomers and researchers have given this beautiful *Blackstar* the fitting name of YahZarah.

Neo-soul and funk are the sounds that fill this young star's heart. With a stage presence that bares traces of the likes of legendary diva Tina Turner and a sound influenced by R&B icons such as James Brown, Sly Stone and Aretha Franklin, the artist formerly-known-as Dana Williams is set to join the ranks of her music idols with her "official" debut LP, *Blackstar*. Her real debut LP, *Hear Me*, is a hard-to-find and highly sought-after CD that fans of quality neo-soul and critics alike praised upon its limited release in 2001. Of course, her history as a professional soul singer extends way beyond the release of her first release. In fact, her inspiring story is something that she believes is owed to the divine plans of God.

"Prior to my mother becoming pregnant, they told her she would never be able to carry babies full-term," informs the up-and-coming songstress. "It was funny because my father knew she was pregnant before *she* did.... it was prophesized that I would create music and that God would allow me to touch many people through not only voice, but through art and dance." Elaborating on her prophesized life, YahZarah has also explained

her upbringing – she was one of thirteen children and a descendent of the African Ashanti tribe. Her grandfather had three wives and twenty-one children, so it was under such circumstances that she would not actually meet her father until age fourteen. "In their culture, this was not uncommon. I mean, my father likes the ladies and the ladies like him," says YahZarah. "He's a wonderful person and life's too short to harbor resentment and ill will when you have someone who's as courageous as him." Perhaps it is due to these good-natured spirits and admiration of her father that Dana Williams adopted the name YahZarah.

After meeting her father, young Dana was given the name of her deceased grandmother, Yah Atchewincohma. In the Ashanti language, "Yah" means "Queen Mother." The second half of her name is a twist on her living grandmother's name, Sarah (or Zarah, in Arabic). When she discovered that her birth name, Dana, means, "brightest star," people started to translate her entire name as "Queen Mother Is The Brightest Star." It wouldn't be long before she actually got to prove just how bright of a star she was.

As a former student of the Duke Ellington School of Music, this D.C. native would receive the unimaginable opportunity to perform with legends Stevie Wonder, Anita Baker and Dave Brubeck. She began fronting an R&B band and, almost as if God willed it, they were all accepted on full scholarship to North Carolina Central University to study and perfect their art. However, YahZarah wouldn't spend enough time in

college to experience the finer points of sorority hazing and binge drinking. Soon after beginning college, she auditioned and landed a job as a background vocalist for the established neo-soul sista, Erykah Badu.

College became a thing of the past as she began touring the world for six years with Badu. She sang on Ms. Badu's successful *Mama's Gun* CD, appeared on *Letterman*, BET's *106th & Park*, and even played the role of the Nickel Bag Lady in Badu's "Bag Lady" video. However, before all this activity, YahZarah had made a connection with one of her music professors, Chip Shearin.

During time off from her rigorous touring schedule, with the help of Shearin, YahZarah managed to record *Hear Me*. "We worked on the music when I wasn't on the road and eventually decided to hit the market with 5000 copies of my first release," YahZarah remembers. "We sold all the copies and even though it was only a small amount, it created awareness for me in places as close as Atlanta and as far away as Japan and Sweden."

It is this awareness and anticipation that YahZarah hopes to maintain and expand on with her latest release, *Blackstar*. As she says herself, "I'm not focusing on competition." Rather, she feels she can "bring something new to the industry. I'm working to be a consummate artist. I want to continue to grow musically and hope I can bring artistry and technique. There is a lot of cookie cutter music out there." Most will agree, and those studying the night-time sky will find that this sista's celestial body illuminates soul. – A. Casanovas ★