

BILLY PORTER

In today's sound-byte stylized marketplace, it's a refreshing change to experience the talents of a singer who is simply young, gifted and real - like Billy Porter

Let's begin with the voice. Powerful from its heartfelt bottom to its roof-raising top. Impassioned. Authentic. Then bear witness to its purpose: to give us something we can *feel* through genuine emotion in his interpretation of carefully crafted lyrics. It's the voice of an artist who warrants serious attention. With the Fall 1997 release of his DV8/A&M Records debut, **UNTITLED**, there is no doubt that attention will be given.

With **UNTITLED**, the seven-year vocal veteran takes listeners on an emotion-filled journey with twelve "story-telling" tunes that make us believers in "*True Love*," acknowledge the fact that life happens on "*Borrowed Time*," and rejuvenate our sagging hope that, "*Love Is On The Way*," even if we no longer believe in it or just when we are ready to give up hope. Listen to the album's first single, "*Show Me*," and you'll feel this young singer's power and love for "testifying" through music.

It took a firm belief in his own talent for Billy Porter to snag the beautiful ballad "*Love Is On The Way*," for his debut album. Written by Denise Rich, Peter Zizzo and Tina Shafer, the torchy pop song was originally slated for a "name" artist. It's the kind of ballad that wins Grammys for established artists - but Porter (Grammy-free, but determined), embarked on a mission to convince the record company what he already knew: "*Love Is On The Way*" was meant for him to sing.

Two years ago, during the annual staging of his Christmas concert to benefit the organization, "Broadway Cares: Equity Fights AIDS," Porter performed "*Love Is On The Way*" and received a standing ovation. A standing ovation in Town Hall. Porter recalls laughing, "I went to the record execs who were sitting in the audience and asked them, 'Now do you believe this song is for me?'"

Shortly thereafter, the artist secured a single deal for "*Love Is On the Way*," to appear on the soundtrack for hit movie "The First Wives Club." Songwriter and producer Peter Zizzo (best known for the Celine Dion hit, "*Misled*") then worked furiously with Porter in the recording studio for eight months to mine additional tracks for the artist's (full-length) debut: "There is no doubt that Peter helped me find my sound," acknowledges Porter, who until recently, had been singing on Broadway. "He helped me figure out how to create the fervor and excitement of singing live and scale it down for recording."

The results of the collaboration between Zizzo and Porter are five additional songs including Porter's soaring and gospelized rendition of Paul McCartney's hit, "*Maybe I'm Amazed*," against the powerful backdrop of a full-fledged choir. Explains Porter, "I didn't want to do an album without at least one song with a gospel vibe because that is so much of who I am."

Porter's extensive vocal training began in the Sunday church choir in the East Liberty section of his native Pittsburgh. This experience led to young Billy's placement in the All City Junior Choir and concert performances in public schools. By age eleven, Billy was introduced to musical theater training through an after school program and got cast in his first play. It's training that he's doubly grateful for now that so many government-funded, after school programs have been cut: "Having a place to go on Saturdays kept me off the streets and gave me a sense of purpose. There are so many inner-city kids who could have also benefitted from what that experience gave me, but they won't have the opportunity," laments Porter.

Extensive training in vocal, saxophone and dance lessons helped the artist secure acceptance into the Performing Arts High School in Pittsburgh - despite the fact that his mother was so "dead set against it." "I thank my mother for having the vision to listen and let me do what was in my heart," says Billy. Porter honed his skills during his college years at the prestigious Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, which counts among its alumni, Holly Hunter and Ted Danson. "By the time I graduated from Carnegie Mellon, I felt confident that I had the training to take me from Shakespeare to "Grease" and everything else in between."

Porter further developed his vocal chops and signature wail with performances in hit Broadway musicals like "Miss Saigon," "Five Guys Named Moe," and "Grease." With New York cabaret gigs at clubs such as Rose's Turn, Don't Tell Mama and The Duplex, it came as no surprise that many producers, managers, and record executives began frequenting Billy's showcases, most notably his benefit concert, "Broadway Cares: Equity Fights AIDS," which he stages annually.

After offers from several record companies, Porter decided to go with Grammy-winning producer Ric Wake's offer for a deal with DV8 Records distributed through A&M Records. Porter then immediately went into the studio with producer Peter Zizzo as well as Gary Haase (former musical director for Chaka Khan) who produced the songs, "*I'll Do Anything*" and "*I'll Be There*." On the latter tune, Porter recalls, "When Gary played that song for me, it resonated with so much quiet emotion and reminded me that all the friends I've lost through the AIDS epidemic are still here in spirit."

Producer Warren McCrae is responsible for the songs "*For Your Love*" and Porter's soulful rendition of "*Show Me*." "I loved Glenn Jones so much that I was initially hesitant to take on "*Show Me*" because he did it so perfectly," says Porter, "but now I am happy with what I brought to the table, too."

Now Porter hopes his debut album will allow him to take his theatrical training ("I'm proud of the work I've done on Broadway and wouldn't trade it for anything!") and vocal skills to the next level of his career. He has already appeared on talk shows including "The Rosie O'Donnell Show" performing "*Love Is On The Way*." Assuredly Porter explained, "There is someone out there who needs to see my image - a sophisticated young Black man making my hopes and dreams come true."

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