



STING

"Brand New Day"

With customary thoughtfulness and his usual verve, Sting is talking about **Brand New Day**, his sumptuous new album, a collection of songs exploring the theme of love. "I didn't set out to write lyrics just about love, yet almost all the songs have the theme of broken lives that can be mended by love. My challenge was to write a happy love song without being banal or smug. For example, 'Brand New Day,' the last song, begins with a jaundiced view and then moves toward acceptance, to diving back into love. It's basically the thought that falling in love is an act of optimism - and I think if the album has a tone, for me...it's an optimistic one."

Incorporating highly rhythmic elements, echoes of Miles Davis and medieval plainsong, of Algerian pop and American Country Music, **Brand New Day** also ranges, with typical Sting audacity, over a world of styles - here's love in abundance of musical tongues. For every irresistible hook or melody, there's a rhythmic challenge or instrumental surprise. "Trying to write simple pop songs over a compound time is my idea of a crossword puzzle - or three-dimensional chess," Sting explains. "That's my obsession." "And," he laughs, "I think people expect that of me to throw them a few loops here and there. They'd probably be disappointed if I didn't."

Co-produced by Sting and producer/programmer Kipper and featuring Sting's customary peerless collaborators - guitarist Dominic Miller, drummers Manu Katche and Vinnie Colaiuta - and guest stars James Taylor, Stevie Wonder, Branford Marsalis, Chris Boti and Cheb Mami, Sting's seventh solo studio outing builds on the legacy of a visionary original, impatient with labels, categories. Commencing with the simmering 'A Thousand Years,' its urgent Bach-derived two-beat motif capturing the essence of a love so insistent as to transcend time, **Brand New Day** soars from the fantasy romance of 'After the Rain,' with its whirling dervish strings, to the off-kilter bossa nova 'Big Lie, Small World,' a vignette about regret, to the profound human comedy of 'Fill Her Up,' a country tune in 9/8 time that rises to a rousing gospel chorus.

This time out, Sting took a new creative approach. "I composed, finessed and even sequenced the music," he says, "before I'd ever written a word. I had to trust that the music would tell me stories, begin to create characters. It's a much more mystical process. You have to be more patient. It's a little like sculpting a piece of wood - you begin to see faces in the wood." The sculptural metaphor is an apt one for Sting; from whatever materials he employs, he crafts something startling, fresh and universal.

Since setting out from Newcastle, site of English shipbuilders and ancient Roman walls, this former teacher, soccer coach and ditch digger has made music a perpetual adventure. The Police, of course, established him as world-renowned songwriter and singer: **with Outlandos D'Amour, Regatta De Blanc, Zenyatta Mondatta, Ghost in the Machine, Synchronicity** and a clutch of live and best-of sets, the band Sting headed assumed the vanguard of contemporary music throughout the late Seventies and early Eighties

On his own, he continued pioneering. The Dream of the Turtles, Bring on the Night...Nothing Like the Sun, The Soul Cages, Ten Summoner's Tales and Mercury Falling found him equally adept at synthesis. Recording since 1978, accruing a dozen Grammys and four Brit Awards, he's also extended his reach by acting in films from 1979's seminal film *Quadrophenia* to the recent British comedy romp, *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*, appearing on Broadway in *Threepenny Opera*, and embracing activism for causes as various as rainforest preservation and Amnesty International.

Now content, however, to rest on the laurels of past accomplishment, Sting now moves relentlessly forward. Of *Brand New Day* and his current outlook, he says, "I feel the millennium is very much a part of this record - and as my strategy in life is to be optimistic, in art I want to be the same. We need to look positively toward the future and not be sucked in by the lunacy that this is the end of the world, or that everything's going to fall apart - trouble, strife, plague, all that stuff. All of that becomes self-fulfilling. So my strategy is to be optimistic, naïve maybe. But maybe that's my job."

Naiveté, perhaps, but of a singularly artful kind. Note, not only his bass and guitar work throughout the album, but his singing - certainly some of his most expressive yet. Delight in the deep funk of 'Perfect Love...Gone Wrong,' a love song, of all the things of the canine variety ("I think I may have been a dog in a previous life," Sting jokes). Check the smokey string-swept beauty of 'Tomorrow We'll See,' a bittersweet take on love for sale, about the compassionate rendering of the song's streetwalking gender-bender. There's a Brazilian aspect to it, an aspect of '50's noir film, but this character is very proud - not willing to be judged." In 'Desert Rose' Sting once again bridges musical culture. "The song," Sting comments, "is about longing...sexual longing, romantic long, within a larger context, which is philosophical longing for meaning or God or whatever. I asked Cheb Mami (Algerian singing sensation) to compose Arabic lyrics. I gave him the counter-melody, but didn't tell him what the song was about. He came back a few days later and started to sing. When I said 'what are you singing about?' he replied, 'longing.' I said, 'well, it's very strange you should say that.' But it does prove my theory that music was writing the songs."

On 'After the Rain has Fallen,' Sting sings of a thief of love who wields 'no weapon but his surprise.' That 'weapon,' of a musical variety, remains Sting's greatest asset - and, over the year, it's been polished to a brilliant finish. Never complacent, always a risk-taker, he continues to explore new realms of sound, of soul, of surprise.

It's a **Brand New Day** indeed.