

from the soul



Move over Kate Nash and Adele...
there's a new songbird from Cambridge
about to ruffle some feathers
with her soulful sound

Words by Louise Cummings Pictures by Alex Weatherill



‘I’ll just be walking past a shop one day and I’ll hear a rhythm or a baseline that sets me humming, so I’ll leave a message on my phone going ‘la la la la’

If the number of messages left on Beth Walthew’s answering machine is anything to go by, you’d think she was the most popular girl in Cambridge. Her phone is always flashing angrily at her when she walks through the door.

Closer inspection would reveal that Beth has been leaving the voicemails for herself... and granted, she does like the sound of her own voice (with her sultry tones, who wouldn’t?) but the warm and friendly 29-year-old is by no means an egomaniac! In fact, Beth is an incredibly talented singer who calls her voicemail and sings her heart out every time she is struck by inspiration for a new song, for fear she won’t be able to commit the melody to memory.

“I’ll just be walking past a shop and I’ll hear a rhythm or a baseline coming and that sets me humming, so I’ll leave a message on my phone going ‘la la la la’, trying not to be heard as I’m doing it! It’s really geeky,” she blushes. “But once I’ve got an idea it all happens in about 20 minutes and the song is done!”

That said, it seems only a matter of time before Beth’s answerphone is bombarded with messages from promoters and labels, as her silky smooth voice is discovered. The Sunderland-born singer, whose music is a fusion of soul and jazz, is already making her mark on the London music scene, regularly playing the Regal Rooms in Hammersmith and the Bedford Bandstand. And her Cambridge fan base is growing after performances at the Boathouse, Portland Arms and the Elm Tree as part of Ladyfest last March, then an appearance at Strawberry Fair in the summer. “That was brilliant,” Beth smiles. “There were about 300 people in the acoustic tent sitting around and the atmosphere was amazing. Afterwards I found two blog entries from complete strangers saying they’d seen me and liked my music, which felt fantastic.”

Beth, who lives with her husband Chris in Thoday Street in Cambridge, is now working on an album, and describes her music as soul, with elements of jazz, funk and blues, due in part to the influences of her band – guitarist Neil Cowlan, bassist Andy Borman and drummer Seb Palmer. “Neil is a brilliant blues guitarist and Seb is really down the funk line so we kind of have funk blues, while Andy is disco and I’m soul; it’s amazing to hear what happens when we are together as a band.”

Among the tracks on the album will be 'Listening to Empty Promises' – a beautiful emotional ballad about plunging the depths of despair after being dumped. "That's the first one I finished for the album," Beth explains, "although it worries me because it is about this lady being ditched and drowning her sorrows at the end of a bar, so it's a real heartwrencher – but I wrote it three months after getting married," she laughs. "My husband was like 'is there something we should be talking about here?!' But I just draw on life's experiences to write my songs."

A more upbeat ditty, which has gone down a storm on stage is the track 'Morning Love', although Beth explains it has left her red faced at times: "The song is basically about naughtiness in the morning," she giggles. "But it was embarrassing last Christmas because I gave all the elderly relatives a copy of my CD and they didn't really get what it was about – but were all humming 'Morning Love' and I was like 'God, don't do that!'"

'My husband is my biggest fan'

The album should be ready in the summer, and for now Beth is happy to use husband Chris as a springboard for feedback. "He is my biggest fan," she smiles. "He's come to every gig that I have done and it's great because he's not a musician so he gives me the feedback of the man on the street."

Beth met and fell in love with Chris at Lancaster University, where she was studying for a degree in music. Growing up listening to the sounds of Dusty Springfield, Ella Fitzgerald, Stevie Wonder, the Beatles and Neil Sedaka, she had always known she wanted to be a musician. "There's a great picture of me when I was about six months old on my mum's knee leaning over and playing the organ!" she laughs.

Mastering the piano at the age of seven, Beth followed a classical route before embracing opera and joining the London Symphony Chorus. However, after taking a job with the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, she began to experience the freedom and joy of jazz. "I started working with some jazz musicians in London and I found getting into jazz – especially through the standards of people like Ella Fitzgerald – was a freer way of singing."

Having always set their sights on living in Cambridge – 'We always said we'd



live in Cambridge when we grew up,' laughs Beth – she and Chris moved up lock stock and barrel, setting up their own telemarketing company, Prospect Research, in Gwydir Street.

Today Chris is MD of the company while Beth is the marketing manager part time, giving her valuable space to write her songs, rehearse and record her album.

With her amazing voice, which is most impressive during her atmospherically charged acoustic sets, fame is surely just a few notes away. Although, more than anything, Beth just wants her lyrics to capture people's imaginations. "My

ultimate goal is to be on any stage anywhere and have the audience sing my words back – like when U2 or Coldplay hold out a microphone and the crowd know the words; that would be amazing. Until then I might have to give some song sheets out and say 'sing this and I'll give you a fiver!'"

Find out more about Beth Walthew on her website at www.bethwalthew.com where you can get free downloads every few months. See her perform live at The Bun Shop on King Street, Cambridge, March 17th or The Boathouse on April 13th.