

soul sides: Amy Winehouse: Live at the Roxy

Echo 75 Items

Admin



Guest

Am i alone in thinking that there's more soul in five seconds of Gnarl's Barkley's Crazy or Outkast's Hey Ya than on the entire Back to Black album (and for me, the ghostface killer collaboration is by far the most soulful stuff Amy's ever done)

April 10, 2007, 2:13:32 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



oliver

winehouse's music doesn't move me one iota..

but hell I'm a tuff son o gun to impress

saw sharon jones live at frank's lounge in bk before she was doing larger rooms and they blew the roof off that mofo.. good memory

April 1, 2007, 6:57:38 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



G147

She also looks like a Burning Angel girl. My two cents.

March 29, 2007, 4:48:54 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



G147

Amy Winehouse is a swagger jacker and she does not realize it, even.

March 29, 2007, 4:46:12 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



III MF

my opinion, albeit comparatively simplistic, is that someone like Sharon Jones never wrote a song as catchy as 'Rehab'. Winehouse is not much different to a singer/wongwriter like Alicia Keys who achieved equal if not greater success. Whilst I'm not Amy Winehouse's biggest fan, I think to play the race card is a little harsh. Her songs are catchy as hell and her mainstream success is more to do with that rather than her ethnicity.

March 27, 2007, 5:12:53 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



Jesse

let her do what she does.

March 27, 2007, 12:58:23 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



Travis

I didn't read all the comments, but I think the post is pretty much on point.

I've been late getting into the whole Soul thing so I've been interested in her music. I'm not to lie though, the music itself caught my ear first. I'm sure it could be seen as someone like 3rd Bass (or Em for that matter) was back in the day with hip hop. They get props for being somewhat authentic, but they will always be questioned by the people who are truly into that genre.

March 26, 2007, 3:37:49 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



ApexofDujeous

Another difference between SJ and AW: AW puts a modern, post-hip-hop twist on retro soul ("You Know That I'm No Good"), while SJ and the whole Daptone crew aim for an exact replica.

March 26, 2007, 1:03:21 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



mcr

hey sam i recommend you go see sharon and the boys at the end of march at the jazz cafe and get a real dose

March 24, 2007, 2:03:49 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



sam

this is an interesting debate going on. i haven't read all the way through... but has anyone mentioned the differing personalities of jones & winehouse? granted, i think winehouse gets a great deal more press because she is white. but she also gets a lot of press (at least over here in the uk) because she is a train crash in slow motion and she is very, very quotable. so i think her personality goes a long way as far as garnering her press attention. a lot is being written from a production point of view about her music over here too. mark ronson is suddenly the golden boy (or at least the press has decided that all of a sudden he is) and her music gets plenty of press this way. to be honest i've read very little press about sharon jones (though i love her music and would love one day to see her), so i can't possibly remark on her marketability from a personality perspective.

March 24, 2007, 1:45:29 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



Tom Ward

Hey O.W., long time listener, first time caller.

Thought I'd throw this into the mix - the BBC had some pretty interesting documentaries on recently about Soul in Britain:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/music/soulbritannia/>

Anyway, one thing that struck me was that the only person interviewed that didn't say "I don't care about what race you are, it's just about the music" was one white record producer. If you're interested, maybe I can sort you out with a copy of the shows.

Of course, who our current corporate overlords think they should market/hype/bullshit is another matter...

March 24, 2007, 4:54:14 AM PDT

– Like – Reply



O.W.

"Amy's voice is something we've not heard live and in person in my generation."

Uh, sure we have. Her name is Lauryn Hill. Seriously.

I'm not trying to hate on Amy in saying that but they have remarkably similar timbre and Winehouse seems to follow very similar phrasing too. She sang "Doo Wop (That Thing)" at the show and for a moment, you could have sworn L Boogie had made a comeback.

March 23, 2007, 10:52:54 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



rachel

i have not read any comments posted, just what you wrote. First off, the back up to AMY..HELLO PLEASE the Dap Kings, back up to the one and only Sharon Jones. The Horn section alone is what carries her tune beyond "catchy".

Amy's voice is something we've not heard live and in person in my generation. I have to dig up old vinyl and VHS (anyone remember the movie Sparkle?) to ignite what i feel when listening to this voice.

Yes her songs are pop sugar pop...but KUDOS to her for unapologetically owning her toxins--and KUDOS to her for choosing an absolutely amazing band to back her.

Listen to the the horns people.

March 23, 2007, 8:24:28 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



paul

Much as I like Naturally, and Sharon Jones does have a great voice, you've got to admit that quite a few of the songs are let down by weak tunes and truly bad lyrics. In contrast, AW has sassy lyrics with attitude. It's almost obvious that AW wrote most of her own lyrics whereas SJ is singing words written by a man. Give SJ some decent material and she could be as big a star as AW but currently she puts out too much weak stuff - nothing to do with colour, race or country.

March 23, 2007, 12:47:15 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



Luke

I dont think this is so much of a race issue and here's why...if a young, attractive black woman with a publicly wild lifestyle put out the same record...I think she could attract the same type of hype and success. Maybe I'm wrong?

March 23, 2007, 2:01:08 AM PDT

– Like – Reply



Debs

I was going to send you the link to Issac's Walk On By commemorating the 50th anniversary Stax cd. Here it is. (scroll a bit)

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=8914101>

March 22, 2007, 8:05:34 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



bwan

ha, that's funny. now that you post that i remember reading it on your site...

March 22, 2007, 3:32:59 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



o.w.

Bwan,

<http://soul-sides.com/2006/05/caprells-jo-ann-garrett-el-michaels.html>

March 22, 2007, 3:24:16 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



bwan

on a slightly different note, have you heard the el michels affair album? in a similar vein musically as sharon jones, only no vocals. and probably a touch more hip hop influence...

March 22, 2007, 2:57:42 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



o.w.

Bwan,

Fair enough - I didn't catch your distinction about the pop thing earlier but in that case, sure, AW's is more "pop" friendly.

March 22, 2007, 1:49:08 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



bwan

odub.

i think you're fudging my argument a bit. i'm not saying good=commercial success, so much as i'm saying if commercial success is your goal, it usually helps to have pop songs, with pop arrangements and pop production values. and by those standards, yes a.w.'s record is better.

so i'm not strictly talking about merit. like i said a couple of comments ago, if you're going to talk about commercial success, then you're talking about music that the masses can buy. so you're talking about pop music. i'm not saying a.w. is better than sharon jones. i am saying her album is poppier, and more commercially viable, though.

and more to the point of this original argument, it's you who has more or less been claiming that a.w. can succeed where an older, blacker artist can't because of bias. to which i still respond: perhaps there is some bias involved. far more important is the pop quality of one album vs. the other.

March 22, 2007, 1:34:29 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



Pete

I dont think I have anything insightful to add on top of all the comments already made...I do have to say however that I have seen firsthand a handful of people, who definately are not into soul music (and some of whom I know for a fact dont like Sharon Jones), who really like 'Back to Black' a lot. Sharon's music is superb quality, completely authentic soul, which unfortunately is not very marketable in this day and age. Ms. Winehouse seems to appease a broad range of tastes, whereas Sharon is for the true soul heads.

March 22, 2007, 12:27:37 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



o.w.

Just to add: I'm also certain we can name a few albums your girlfriend loves that no one else did.

That kind of anecdotal evidence doesn't stand up against the mounds of historical evidence that makes the simple suggestion that merit alone doesn't explain the success of certain artists over others.

To go back a sec: a better question would be: "show me how many 50 year old Black singers would be able to get signed to a major label."

An extension of your argument is that there are not 50 year old Black singers good enough to get signed. Is that really what you want to say?

March 22, 2007, 10:34:21 AM PDT

– Like – Reply



o.w.

Bwan,

Naw man, no hijacking - it's a comments section. People are supposed to comment so I'm glad the space is being used accordingly.

This said: you keep coming back to this argue, "well...is the album good?"

Are you telling me that all successful albums are such b/c they are "good"? If that's the case, I'd like you to take a look at some Billboard and Soundscan charts for me and make the case that all the best-sellers on there are there because they're unqualifiably great works of music.

Saying that commercial success is a reflection of quality is like saying people in society are rich because of merit. I mean, it's a great ideal but it doesn't actually exist.

March 22, 2007, 10:32:20 AM PDT

– Like – Reply



bwan

ow.

sorry to keep commenting...i feel like i'm hijacking your blog...feel free to stop responding whenever...

your first comment i'll pass on, and agree to disagree.

but your second comment...point me to all of the 50+ year old black soul singers that have put out good, commercially viable albums, then we'll find the commercially succesful 50+year old black soul singers.

another completely subjective anecdote. played sharon jones a bunch last month when i finally got around to buying some of her mp3's. my girlfriend was pretty lukewarm. she liked it, but got a little tired of me replaying "how long..." started playing amy winehouse repeatedly recently, and my girlfriend really likes it. mind you, she has no idea who amy is, never read an interview, never even seen the record sleeve. it's just a better pop record, hands down. and thus, is gonna sell a lot more records...

March 22, 2007, 10:02:55 AM PDT

– Like – Reply



o.w.

Bwan,

I think this goes back to the "we'll have to agree to disagree" point in that case. I'm not sure how anyone can discuss the modern recording industry without taking into account the historical and contemporary evidence of bias that guides its marketing, promotions and distribution decisions.

If you can point me to all the commercially successful 50+ year old Black soul singers out there vs. 20 year old Black/White folks in the same musical vein, I'm all ears.

March 22, 2007, 9:39:46 AM PDT

– Like – Reply



bwan

ow

i'm not sure i would agree that bias plays a significant role in winehouse's success at all.

i could agree that there is a bit of institutional bias working against sharon jones. i just maintain that she's not doing herself any favors with the songs she writes and producers she uses if larger success is her goal.

March 22, 2007, 8:10:57 AM PDT

– Like – Reply



Debs

Here's a rave on Sharon Jones and the Dap Kings at SXSW. I picked this up at the NPR blog. They said the crowd was awed by the showmanship of Sharon & the Dap Kings. They took the love that they have for each other and poured it on the audience.

write up SXSW

<http://2007.sxsw.com/music/showcases/band/52145.html>

March 22, 2007, 7:40:23 AM PDT

– Like – Reply



o.w.

Bwan,

It shouldn't be an either/or. My point isn't that bias completely explains Winehouse's success but nor should the idea that it's purely a question of talent. Surely BOTH can be factors. What we might quibble about is the ratio.

March 21, 2007, 10:35:03 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



bwan

OW

i think we'll have to agree to disagree, then.

i offer only one last piece of highly subjective commentary: i heard both of sharon jones last two albums the day they came out (both on virgin megastore featured new release stations). thought they were fine. eventually downloaded a few songs off emusic.

i heard amy winehouses album from a few blogs here and there and an advance copy. thought it was great immediately. bought it right away. knew it was gonna be a pretty big record.

i suspect that a similar process went into the decisions of all sorts of people who bought one record and not the other. you see racism and biases. i see people signing an artist with a more marketable sound, and other people buying a record they like.

but, we both like all of the aforementioned records. so life is good. thanks for the posts.

b

March 21, 2007, 9:50:57 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



MAC

Lots of interesting points brought up here. I'm a longtime SJ and the Dap-Kings fan ("What if We All Stopped Paying Taxes?" is one of the best protest songs I've heard in years). I was excited when I saw them perform on the Conan O'Brien Show a few years ago - I had high hopes that exposure would convince tens of thousands to run out and buy "Naturally." I don't know what that performance did for their record sales, but one fact that fits in the image issue is that we need to consider how the Daptone label presents Jones' image. Daptone is a small, but great indie that releases many records that seem like they were produced in the mid-60's (i.e. the record covers, the designs of the 45-singles, the band members' fashions). I mean, Jones and the Dap-Kings looked like they were performing at the Apollo in 1966 on the O'Brien show. I remember when many journalists and critics lumped the Daptone bands together with other "retro" bands like the Breakestra, Poets of Rhythm, Antibalas, and even the solo project of Yesterday's New Quintet as novelities of contemporary folks playing very old-fashioned music. Such memories come back to me when I compare Jones with Winehouse. They're both great soul singers with ace bands backing them up. However, Daptone appears to present SJ and the Dapkins as a sort of artifact from the past, while Island presents Winehouse as an gritty, late 00's rock star. We have Jones who looks like a veteran gospel singer and we have Winehouse who looks like a Suicide Girl who just kicked an Oxycontin addiction. And in the sexually charged pop world, guess who would get more attention?

March 21, 2007, 9:12:58 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



Debs

should read

If Amy Winehouse was a...

sorry for the typos.

March 21, 2007, 6:11:10 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



Debs

I think they would profile an aging black male soul funk artist. How many times was James Brown lauded and written up in Rolling Stone. I know he is one of a kind but men become more valuable as they get older, no?

Would it be "saucy and spunky, even sexy" if Sharon was drunk, fighting and cancelling shows? Has an older black male artist been able to? Probably.

Sharon writes songs that speak to her age, wisdom, experiences and spirit. Amy does the same. They really are only connected by the Dap Kings in my opinion.

If Amy Winehouse as an black young woman, to my disgrace I would make the assumption that her brand of soul would be neo-soul and contemporary R&B. I know Alice Smith and Leela James and other female artist perform old and new school soul, but I'm being honest about my ass upmtion.

Forget the rock, edgy aspect though. Danielle Cotton is be lauded for being an African American female rocker and "breaking through" in 2007. (She's bluesy and fantastic!)

Of course Sharon is a recipient of ageism, sexism and racism, she is part of this society.

March 21, 2007, 6:09:00 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



o.w.

There's something a bit sketchy in purely putting responsibility on something as subjective as "quality of songwriting." For one thing, people like a lot of songs that have nothing to do with the quality of the songwriting (house music for example) but rather, the sonic approach and feel of the music.

For another, the attempt to focus on the individual can sometimes seem like an excuse to avoid dealing with structural biases. One of the above commentators made an excellent point: Amy Winehouse gets played on a lot of alternative rock stations that wouldn't touch a Black artist **EVEN WITH SIMILAR SONGS**. Being "raunchy" is hardly some kind of new invention amongst female artists but how much would someone like to bet that Kelis isn't likely to get programmed next to, I dunno, John Mayers or Dave Matthews on some of these stations but Amy Winehouse would?

Yeah, Amy writes great songs, I don't deny this. But people need to stop throwing out "talent" as this red herring when I think most of us would agree: the music industry does not always reward talent nor is it a pure meritocracy. If that were the case, there weren't be so many successful artists lacking in talent (and I'm sure we could drum up a list that would fill pages of people who fit that bill).

Once again: I'm not attacking Amy Winehouse. But I am putting out the idea that she's able to "succeed" in ways that other artists aren't able to which have less to do with "talent" and have everything to do with biases in the music industry.

March 21, 2007, 3:36:35 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



bwan

ow.

another recurring theme of my visits to this site is that your comments are far better written than mine. thanks for the reply.

so just to focus on one topic, you said:

we are NOT talking about "pop music in general" but rather, about the specific sound of retro soul being used.

but once we start talking about record sales and financial success, aren't we really talking about the broader topic of "pop music?"

i guess i can agree that sharon jones doesn't have the same appeal as A.W. for the 18 year old kid who'd rather see a scantily clad woman sing about rehab. but i seem to recall ray charles selling a crap load of records the last few years. i also know for a fact that sharon jones album found it's way on to recommended lists and was featured at virgin megastores prominently. so maybe the public just didn't like it as much as amy's record?

so maybe mr. funke above is correct in saying sharon jones should just write better songs?

March 21, 2007, 1:03:12 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



Tobias Funke

Perhaps Sharon Jones and the Dap-Kings should just arm themselves with better songs? Seriously, I've yet to hear a track from them as memorable as "Rehab", "Tears dry on their own", "addicted" or (personal fave) "He can only hold her", regardless of production values or otherwise. And I say that as someone who likes them!

March 21, 2007, 11:56:18 AM PDT

– Like – Reply



O.W.

Bwan,

Winehouse was getting a ton of press coverage long before her album was available so I don't know if an argument about the relative quality of her album is relevant here.

Why we should care about what "lame magazine articles" have to say is because this is precisely the difference in privilege I was talking about: more press usually = more sales. Therefore, if you have an artist who is benefiting from greater press, you'd also expect that they'd command more power in the marketplace.

I don't question that Winehouse's album is more polished for the pop market than the average Jones/Dap-Kings LP. And I'd further agree that yeah, if Ronson produced the next Sharon Jones album, it'd be the biggest selling record of her career. A few questions though:

- 1) Would Ronson produce a Sharon Jones album?
- 2) Would a major label pick up Jones and the Dapkins and lend the kind of resources it would take to hire someone like Ronson?
(And would Jones/Dapkins desire such an arrangement).
- 3) Would that record - even with a high-profile producer attached earn as much sales, press or praise as someone like an Amy Winehouse or Joss Stone?

I'd suggest the answer to all three of these question is likely "no" for all the reasons already laid out.

Let me be VERY clear: the reason why I think this conversation is relevant is that we are NOT talking about "pop music in general" but rather, about the specific sound of retro soul being used. A 50 year old Black woman is going to have a tough time in the pop game regardless but Jones basically carved out a musical niche that you now see folks like Willis, Russell, and yes, Winehouse following/dabbling in. But ironically, Jones is not set up to benefit from that as much as some of her younger contemporaries even if she was armed with some of the musical benefits that Winehouse enjoyed on Back to Black.

Seriously, I don't think what I'm saying here is very "controversial." These kinds of double standards are rife throughout popular culture. I merely bring it to light, in this case, because retro soul seems to be on the rise.

March 21, 2007, 11:19:08 AM PDT

– Like – Reply



bwan

as usual when i come to this site, i find a lot of the conversation going over my head/off into areas i'm just not that interested in.

so while i'll let smarter people than me tackle the race issues they perceive in this discussion, i would offer this up: amy winehouse is selling more records than sharon jones because she made a better record, in a modern pop sense. her record sounds better. the drums are more hip hop influenced. the arrangements are tighter and more modern. the hooks are "hookier," again in the modern sense. and her lyrical subject matter is a little more immediately engaging. if mark ronson produces sharon jones' next record, she'll have the biggest selling record of her career, no doubt.

for me, all the other stuff about her whiteness and jewishness and absurdly skinniness is stuff for lame magazine articles - and who cares what they say?

March 21, 2007, 10:40:34 AM PDT

– Like – Reply



PB

I guess that what I'm trying to think through would be the counterpoint to a certain image of young black males and black male sexuality. There are a lot of reasons that get cited for the allure of artists like Eminem or Elvis appropriating black cultural forms and identities (to whatever extent you want to argue that they do): some of these aren't sexual (a certain fantasy with criminality and outlaw culture, for example), but many of them are, from the complex desire to be a rapacious Mandingo type without the culpability that you get marked with as a person of color to the more simple desire to be extremely well-endowed. (Since irony and tone have been an issue in this thread, let me say up front that yes, I raise these images as stereotypes, and no, I don't subscribe to any of them).

What I'm less clear about, though, is what's desirable in assuming the cultural identity of a black female -- the marginalization, the sexual and physical vulnerability, etc. -- even if it's possible to "get away with it," so to speak, by actually being white. Is it just a claiming of agency simply through the power to disavow those circumstances? If it's not, what's attractive in claiming that position -- especially when there are so many other models through which to articulate female sexuality?

March 21, 2007, 9:37:18 AM PDT

– Like – Reply



O.W.
PB,

I think you raise an interesting point though I'd like to hear you elaborate on it more. Break it down for us



March 21, 2007, 8:48:15 AM PDT
– Like – Reply



Debs

"We STILL don't live in an era of equal cultural benefit"~OW

I completely agree and think that this has been one of the most insightful conversations I have read on any blog. Thank you to all the posters and their contributions. I think that there is a definite sexual, hip-hop and pop-culture, element to Amy's contemporary appeal. I love that battered but not backing down attitude of hers. In Spin magazine she says.."I'm not a very 'poor me' kind of person,"--if I couldn't sort it out myself, I wouldn't talk about it.

I don't believe that Amy will stay assigned to any one genre for any length of time. (ska covers of The Specials are next, I believe)

Here's Bo Diddley discussing cultural benefit and how he incorporated the music he loved into his sound.

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7496086>

March 21, 2007, 8:26:37 AM PDT
– Like – Reply



PB

I've noticed in looking over people's posts here that there's not much talk of gender as such in this conversation -- a lot of talk about Elvis, Eminem, et. al. as "young white men" and Winehouse as a

"young white woman" but not a lot of talk about what that second category means. It strikes me that there would be a lot to say here about white and black female sexuality, going back through Sharon Jones and Nicole Willis all the way to people like Bessie Smith. Thoughts?...

March 21, 2007, 7:12:10 AM PDT

– Like – Reply



Jeremy

I think Amy Winehouse has many of the posters here hot and bothered, so to speak.

As OW said, this is truly sticky stuff, but it seems like consensus is developing around some of the issues here. As others have made some replies and clarifications, I'll take this opportunity to do the same.

I said Amy Winehouse fits into a long line of white people making money off black music. I'm merely stating this as a fact. I don't question her sincerity or talent. In fact, I think she's incredibly sincere and talented. I don't even question the sincerity or talent of the other artists I mentioned. However, there is the implication in that kind of statement that she shouldn't be singing the music she's singing. And the same for previous artists. I think that's the way some other posters read this. I don't believe in that implication, but I think it enters into the mind of many a thinking person to question the status and popularity of some of these artists.

I'm just saying I think Winehouse has benefited from being a young white woman. As Elvis benefited from being a young white man. As did the Beatles and the Stones. As does Eminem. And on the flip side, Sharon Jones' popularity has suffered because she's older and black. As has Nicole Willis'. Even though they make similar music of incredibly high quality.

As Mikee pointed out, Winehouse's talent and sincerity aren't in question (among others here, and not by myself either). It's her popularity, and the lack thereof among similar artists like Sharon Jones or Nicole Willis.

In my own analysis, and taking into the astute points made by Oliver and other posters, I think, unfortunately, it comes down to race and age.

One way pop music is sold is on difference. What makes Winehouse different from hundreds of other soul singers out there. Well there are hundreds of answers, aren't there? The best of them would be differences in musical and artistic temperament. However, the easy differences to sell her to radio programmers, concert promoters and the public are on her race and age. I guess I'm echoing Kurt's idea that the industry is displaying racism in this case. It might be sad, but it sure looks true.

That said, I hope Amy Winehouse has immediate and lasting success, so that maybe the deep funk revival so ably taken up by Sharon Jones and Nicole Willis might gain wider recognition and appreciation.

March 21, 2007, 7:01:01 AM PDT

– Like – Reply



Mikee

O-Dub,

Do you know who the band backing Mark Ronson and Alex Greenwalt's cover of Radiohead's "Just" is? The Dap-Kings perhaps?

March 20, 2007, 10:56:47 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



Kip

I was excited when I heard the Dap-Kings were on the record. I did not hear about them until the tour. No mention on Allmusic.com or other sources. That sucks. Black/white/green, they are best working band in the US. The press they could have got earlier might have helped Sharon/Binky/Daptone. I also slept on Amy's record as I would have bought it immediately knowing the DKs were there. There is money, corporate money behind Amy and an indie behind Sharon and even with the myspace arena, it's still play for pay.

March 20, 2007, 10:06:00 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



Kurt

Great post OW.

If we can assume for a minute that:

(a) Amy Winehouse is sincere about what she's doing and not simply appropriating a form to make a quick buck (the quality of the album (if not her performance of Beat It!!!) supports this), and:

(b) Amy Winehouse (as with Joss Stone before her) is gonna attract more media/radio attention than other black artists working the same musical vein in part because 'she sounds as good as a black woman' but isn't black (so many stories make this point without a trace of irony!)

then, maybe we can conclude for a second that while Amy Winehouse may not be a racist appropriator, the music/cultural industries are racist.

If that's the case, then what responsibilities (if any) does Amy Winehouse have to do anything about this situation?

Who are the positive role models out there for her, who have effectively managed to subvert and/or contest the racism that (in part) helps them get their profile and airplay?

(PS I hadn't actually realised this was the Dap-Kings playing with her until you pointed that out ... how much coverage is this getting in the US press (I'm in australia...)

March 20, 2007, 8:39:47 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



O.W.

Crilo,

My apologies - I read your original comments as trying to critique my original post (and that you invoked my name in the comments only makes this seem more of the case).

That said, a few follow-up points:

1) Just for the record - and this isn't "aimed" at you but rather, just for sake of clarification: as a general ideology, White Supremacy is practiced by many who are not, in fact, "White." It's about the ideology of the speaker, not about the skin of the speaker.

In any case, given that I misread your original comments (damn this medium!) I apologize for the insinuation since clearly, you were seeking a more nuanced point.

If I may suggest though: you were trying for nuance vis a vis sarcasm and while I am very much guilty of this myself from time to time, it often has the effect of letting the tone define the content vs. the other way around.

2) The history of White appropriation of Black music/culture is sticky indeed and I don't know if there are very clear lines to be found anywhere. Which is to say, it's almost never the case that you can definitively say "there is appropriation/there is not appropriation" going on.

The case of Elvis is very complex on this level. I don't see Elvis as a villainous figure in the way that others have sought to characterize him (I don't mean in the comments section, I mean in general). As Crilo rightfully notes, the history of rock n' roll is American miscegenation through and through; it's neither completely Black nor White though I do think it's worth noting that the African American

contribution has largely been erased from popular history and more so, was definitely erased from the profits of the music industry.

And really - this is where much of this conversation turns back to. Cultural exchange happens all the time, whether consciously or unconsciously and in an ideal world of equality, all would face equal chances of benefiting (or not) from such an exchange.

However, the cultural history of America has shown, time and time and time and time again that inevitably, White adoptions/appropriations/whatever-you-want-to-call-it has proven to be far more materially successful for those artists (not to mention a culture industry that has done few favors to communities of color) than the reverse.

People like Jimi or Charly Pride are therefore, exceptions to the rules - artists who managed to cross the conventional color lines of culture but for the most part, as I think you well know, it hasn't been an equal bargain.

As such, I don't really know if it's fair to use the word "racist" to describe some of the sentiments put out here in regards to questions of "appropriation." It may be that people like Elvis have been unfairly villified or that Amy Winehouse is facing similar criticisms. But I think those questions are entirely important to ask, especially given the history I just discussed. We STILL don't live in an era of equal cultural benefit and while I'm the last person who advocate for some kind of "closed gate" system, I think it's valid to raise the specter of a double standard at play.

March 20, 2007, 7:46:34 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



Mikee

Crilo in p-gro:

I mentioned the Beastie Boys only because I was making a statement about alternative radio. It had nothing to do with appropriating a black style of music. "Rehab" by Amy Winehouse is a soul song. Why would a soul song be played on alternative radio? I don't hear any other soul music being played on alternative radio. That was my point. The same with the Beastie Boys. Very little hip hop if any was played on alternative radio in the late 80's early 90's. However, the Beasties were. That's cool, it really doesn't matter but it begs the question why? I see them as a rap group. Not a white group making black music. I don't see Amy Winehouse as a white woman making black music. I HEAR good music when I listen to her. It doesn't really matter how she is marketed, but the fact that a station(107 The End) that plays Pearl Jam, Nirvana, Coldplay, Soundgarden, Sublime, Interpol, The Rapture, The Cure, etc. would play her also makes one question why, that's all. You wouldn't hear Bad Brains on Hot 97 or some other hip hop or R and B station unless it was a Timbaland Remix with a guest spot from JT.

March 20, 2007, 7:37:26 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



crilo in p-gro

OW

Wow! I guess the sensitivity of the issue is made manifest by the reaction my earlier comment elicited. For clarification sake: 1) I posted as Anonymous cuz the Comment box opens up pretty small on my screen so I didn't see the place for putting in one's name (that being the first time I posted a comment on your blog); no nefarious or cowardly intent, there. But really, is my computer name any more revealing? 2) One could accuse me of misreading your remarks, but I wasn't aiming my remarks at you (which means you misread my comments!). My comments were aimed, as one can see (or not....), at the posters before me who talked of "Elvis co-opting Black music for profit", of white artists "appropriating" (in my dictionary that's defined as "to take possession of, often without permission" -- not a positive association!) black music, and of white artists "making moolah off black music". While there certainly are those performers -- white and black -- who work whatever angle they think will sell even at the expense of their integrity, I'm not seeing Elvis (in his early days) or the British invasion or the Beasties in that light. What you read as a white-supremacist mind-set (without, of course, the benefit of knowing my "race") is merely the voice of someone who's glad that country and r&b got together to make rock n roll, that gospel and r&b got together to make soul, that electronic music, toasting and soul got together to make hip-hop, etc, etc. Rather than the closed mind of which you accuse me, I have a welcoming mind that is accepting of cultural interchange. Which, ironically, is why I put your name in my comment: I was not pointing you out as a hypocrite, but as someone who obviously has a certain level of comfort in the choices you've made regarding your interaction with art (in this case, an artform initiated by black folks but that has become a worldwide cultural movement contributed to by all "races" -- like any worthy and successful artform). No insult intended... 3) ...tho it's tempting when you say something as ignorant (and, I s'pect, intentionally provocative -- Jimi and Bad Brains as artists "going back to the genre's roots"? How so? Cuz you think black folks invented rock and Jimi and the Brains had/have black skin? Can't you see the implications of your statement -- that rock is defined by the color of its performers' skin, so Jimi and the Brains are automatically in the club?) as black folks "invented" rock n roll. I will admit to not being an expert on hip-hop, as it generally isn't my cup, but I do know a bit about rock n roll and its roots. Black folk were there at the genesis (a genesis I won't try to parse, other than to say Elvis' Sun Sessions album mixed in the r&b, country and pop that became the blueprint of rock n roll), but so were white folk. To strengthen your credibility of your response to my original posting, I'd advise passing over the grand statements and presuppositions about someone (me) who you know not.

So. Here're my points: I'm not too tolerant of folks making lazy statements about stuff they haven't investigated sufficiently (yes, everyone's entitled to their opinion, but don't feel burnt if there's a response calling you on it); I wasn't aiming my comments at you, as I don't see you as a lazy statement maker (except for the "blacks invented rock" noise I refer to above); I think it's a bit disingenuous for anybody to read the comments my original posting referred to and not see the implied racism in them. Does that mean I think the folks making those statements are racist? Don't know 'em enough to say, but my comments were about the racism I saw in the comments, not the posters themselves. The deep, largely-unexamined, complicated relation this country and humanity have with racial issues is where my head is at, OW, and not where you think it's at.

Finally, I'm well aware that your original blogpost was not about AW's "right" to make the music she wants. I s'pose I could've ignored the responses that bothered me enough to write, as it got me a bit off your subject, and for that (and for apparently giving you the notion that I discounted your thoughtfulness on the subject), I say I am sorry.

March 20, 2007, 5:58:27 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



O.W.

Kathy,

OUCH.

March 20, 2007, 3:46:19 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



Kathy

Shes a transvestite, isnt she. I mean, really. If she isn't she becomes much less interesting.

March 20, 2007, 3:10:51 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



O.W.

"it's not as simple as race, age, or sexy looks."

Agreed and no one is saying "it's that simple." As noted, it's a combination of a variety of forces.

That said, I don't think Winehouse being on a major is sufficient to explain her popularity. It helps but as with everything else ...it's not that simple 😊

BTW: I've never been that blown away by the Alice Russell stuff myself, nor the Spanky Wilson LP w/ QSO from last year.

I have no formed opinion re: Joan Osborne.

And just as a reminder: if the Winehouse album does do well, I hope it'll raise the exposure/opportunity for similar artists so I'm definitely NOT rooting against Amy.

March 20, 2007, 3:01:46 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



Clarence

Maybe, blacks of black music have a higher standard? Or maybe people's lower expectations of those presented like Amy create that surprise that help associate the music to the face much stronger= more success. I do believe that we are talking about masses of people who have diverse attitudes towards the music they choose. In the end it's just about exposure and word of mouth. There is a strong influence of what your peers are listening to. I think all these answers fit the question "why amy and not Sharon?"

Veronica- I don't think it's fair to lump "hipsters" as soulless. It's almost unfair to even use the term definitively.

March 20, 2007, 2:38:22 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



PB

OW,

For your more general post on this issue, I'd love to see your take on Joan Osborne, who I'd think of as a sort of early forerunner of this trend back in the mid-90s...just a wishful request.

March 20, 2007, 2:28:16 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



anew

i think everyone is missing the point, to an extent. amy winehouse is a major label artist. she is signed to island/universal. that means she has re\$ource\$ that sharon jones and nicole willis do not have. somebody mentioned alice russel, who is another great (imo) "retro-soul" (feel the cringe) singer from the u.k., who is white. she has put out alot of quality music (i perfer the quantic stuff) but somehow hasn't quite caught the mainstream attention. i don't think it's a testment of her talent, i just think it's the reach of her label(s). would alice russel, sharon jones, or nicole willis blow up a la ms. winehouse if they were on majors? i don't know. but the profile a major can create has to be factored into this equation. it's not as simple as race, age, or sexy looks.

i also think that production value plays into it. the little that i've heard from ms. winehouse seems to be more polished sound then the aforementioned artists. i also think that the success that christina aguilera had with her last record opened up a lane for artists like ms. winehouse. but that might be opening up a whole new can of worms.

March 20, 2007, 2:16:33 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



Clarence

I agree sharon probably won't get the same even if she had the exact same voice, music, lyrics. However, I do think Amy does have something Sharon doesn't. Her music has more "hiphop" appeal. Her voice is more distinguishing. Her subject matter has more personality. And the "walking contradiction" act is appealing to hipsters, too hip to be hipsters, jewish, young, those down with blackness, tats, innebriated, good gone bad, sultry, bitter, etc. It's the kind of market that does go to shows. This is the tastemaking market that the industry can never quite put its finger on.

Sharon is dope, but she isn't as distinguishing. She does sound like a very good Marva, or Lynn, or many others. Like above, Alice Russell is white. She's very talented, however, she fits this category with Sharon. I kind of put Joss in here too. Although, there is some proportionality of her fame to her unique voice. (She never blew up as fast as Amy, and her style is IMO not as unique)

It is a combination of factors. I think the color and youth spring about a curiosity amongst the unexpecting purists, and the unexposed youth/hipsters which all adds up to exposure. Everything else adds up to criticism, affirmation, and perhaps longevity.

Sure the industry seems to sell the race card when it can. But I don't think that ever was what sparks the success. They do black music bc it's what influenced them.

March 20, 2007, 2:11:12 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



Veronica

...oh and the soul resurgence crowd is composed of a lot of soulless hipsters. Case in point A Bamboos song on a Gray's Anatomy soundtrack.

March 20, 2007, 2:00:47 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



Veronica

I wrote something about her on my blog yesterday. She has been getting a lot of bloggage and I think that has a lot to do with how good she is. I approached her album as a skeptic because of her looks and style. A person could analyze this from both a feminist and race perspective because if she were not giving off a vibe of sex would she be regarded as highly by this celebrity crazed American audience? It seems doubtful. But her voice speaks for itself and her lyrics are fresh and new. I am reading this book called "The Golden Road: Notes on My Gentrification" and it got me thinking about revisiting the race topic. Race, soul music, people's interest in anorexia and rehab...there's just too much there. It's easiest just to approach Amy Winehouse as a reviewer/listener.

March 20, 2007, 1:55:06 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



O.W.

Just to be clear: whether Winehouse is appropriating or not is - to me - kind of besides the point. I'm less interested in asking, "why is she popular?" and much more interested in asking, "why aren't Sharon Jones and Nicole Willis more popular"?

March 20, 2007, 1:50:06 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



O.W.

Re: the make-up of her shows...

I think what's important to note here is not just WHO is coming to her shows but WHERE her shows are. A place like the Roxy is going to attract a Hollywood/West LA demographic just based on geography alone. Had Winehouse played, say, the Forum in Inglewood, you'd be expect a very different crowd too, much for the same reason.

In any case, it should very much be noted: if you go to a Sharon Jones concert, most of her audience are white and hipster-ish too. There's more to unpack there but I don't have time right now - just realize that retro soul, for the most part, appeals mostly to a young, White, hipster crowd and this is partly the product of the avenues of marketing and what venues these artists play at.

March 20, 2007, 1:47:04 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



O.W.

Anonymous,

You've misread, well, everything that was being said by me (I can't speak for the other commentators). I wasn't questioning whether Winehouse has a "right" to make the music she makes. The fact that you read that into my statement says a lot about where your mind is at (and possibly why you prefer to post anonymously).

In any case, rock n' roll was invented by African Americans so Jimi Hendrix or Bad Brains doing rock is about going back to the genre's roots vs. subverting them.

BTW, I love the idea that asking questions about race and privilege = racism. Such a White Supremacist mind-set...that the merely questioning of racial privilege is a form of reverse racism. LOL.

March 20, 2007, 1:43:51 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



Clarence

Alice Russell?

March 20, 2007, 1:26:03 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



Mikee

Jeremy,

I don't think anyone has said anything about appropriation of style. That has gone on for generations. The list goes on and on as you duly noted. Ms. Winehouse is immensely talented. Her talent and/or appropriation of a style of music is not in question. Why she has been given the attention is. Sharon Jones makes retro-soul music. Amy Winehouse makes retro-soul music. They are backed by the same band. They obviously don't sound the same but they both make retro-sounding music. One has been given significant media attention. The other hasn't. Why? I'm sure that neither of them really care. They both seem to love what they do and they both are pretty dope. But if Mark Ronson produced a Sharon Jones record of the same songs would it produce the same results? It is highly unlikely.

March 20, 2007, 1:15:58 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



Guest

I'm trying to imagine all these white artists named above, hearing the music (art) that excited something so strong in them, and saying to themselves, "Oh, I can't explore that myself, I'm the wrong color!" Lucky for all of us who love music (art) that the racism implied in that statement didn't stop Jimi Hendrix (who started out playing in black bands for black audiences), Bad Brains (punk), Charley Pride (country), Leontyne Price (opera), and, yes, Elvis (who grew up steeped in the sounds around him -- "black" and "white"), Eminem, and Oliver Wang (I'm guessing that this superfan of hip-hop culture lacks the melanin that some see as a birthright to enjoy/produce certain kinds of art).

March 20, 2007, 1:14:38 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



Mikee

Stone,

Many black artists, especially independent and underground, have large non-black followings. Most people that seem to be into Sharon Jones and the Dap-Kings, seem to be the same people that dug Amy Winehouse before she was famous, in the states at least. On several occasions I have been one of the few black faces at shows by black artists. Why don't more blacks go out to see independent artists? I really don't know. I do know that Record companies aren't interested in the demographic that support these underground artists(although that may change with record sales down).

March 20, 2007, 12:40:58 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



Jeremy

OK, now we're starting to get down to it. In answer to your question, "... would Winehouse seem as intriguing if not for her British + Whiteness?" I think I'm in the same camp as a couple other posters here. The answer being, probably not.

Winehouse seems to fit into the long line of white performers making moolah off black music.

Others mention Beasties and Eminem, or Elvis. While we're at it, we could add Justin Timberlake maybe, or most of the '60s British Invasion. Hell, we could even throw in Pat Boone ripping off Little Richard.

The appropriation of a style of music by one racial group or another maybe isn't the question. It's whether or not the performer can carry it off. In Amy Winehouse's case, I think, she carries it off. And that's regardless of her age and skin tone.

Now does anybody want to throw Englishman James Hunter into this debate?

An interesting comment, too, about the crowd at the two Sharon Jones shows mentioned by Stone. I went to one in DC, and was surprised at how white and hipster-ish the crowd was. So I think, all this stuff we're talking about not only reflects on the age and ethnicity of the artists, but of the age and ethnicity of the audience. Who's the music made for? Who's digging it and buying it, and why? Answer those questions and we might really get deep on those questions of identity.

March 20, 2007, 12:40:10 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



Stone

I don't know. I see where you're going here. I do want to add that I've seen Sharon Jones twice live (once in LA, and once in DC) and I was pretty much the only Black person in the audience.

As for Amy, I've enjoyed her as an artist since before she dropped her first album. Most Black people I know are split on the whole thing. Some think she's amazing, and others think that she's a modern day Elvis co-opting Black music for profit. Still, I wonder, if Ms. Winehouse were Black and from Atlanta, would she get all of the buzz and attention the music world? Probably not. Unfortunately her ethnicity is a part of her allure, and that is the result of even deeper questions of racial identity.

March 20, 2007, 12:16:03 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



Mikee

First off "Back to Black" is a great album. I think her singing is earnest and the songwriting isn't bad. While it is nice to actually hear decent music on the radio once in a while that is somewhat new(This album has been out for a minute, late summer early fall if I'm not mistaken, at least the import), we wouldn't even be having this discussion if she was black. I find it interesting that "Rehab" is played on The End, Seattle's Alternashit station. I'm sure it is played on countless similar stations around the country. "You Know I'm No Good" is all over MTV(when they actually show videos). Would they play it if she wasn't white and didn't look like a Suicide Girl? I highly doubt it. If Sharon Jones sang either one of these songs at 50 or in her 20's would never garner the same attention or praise. But this is nothing new. Just look at the Beastie Boys(who I also dig btw) or Eminem(Who I don't). Both of whom were also played on "alternative radio" and got crazy video rotation. It is very disturbing. The only flip of this phenomenon is probably Lenny Kravitz, but that's a whole other topic.

March 20, 2007, 12:14:14 PM PDT

– Like – Reply



O.W.

Yikes! I feel lucky then.

March 20, 2007, 11:45:31 AM PDT

– Like – Reply



Pete

Just to add something. Although her show was great last night, she cancelled her show tonight at Spaceland. This is her 3rd cancellation this week.

What a trainwreck to deal with.

March 20, 2007, 11:41:18 AM PDT

– Like – Reply



Shun

I would love to hear Jones with Mark Ronson or a similar producer. As much praise as I hear about her album "Naturally," I just can't seem to get into it, and I think a big reason has to do with how it's produced. I feel like Sharon's voice gets lost in the mix of all the instruments. You can listen to any old Motown (or Winehouse's album for that matter) and you never get the feeling that the vocals are being fought by the music that is supposed to be backing them. Every time I put in Naturally, my ears are immediately drawn to the guitar line or horns. Just my two cents.

March 20, 2007, 8:01:38 AM PDT

– Like – Reply



O.W.

JL3,

I'm not suggesting the two are identical artists and it's entirely likely/possible that Winehouse would have sold out the Roxy - it's not that big a venue in any case - with an entirely different band/sound just given the kind of following she's built since her debut.

However, I do think it's very notable that Winehouse IS touring/recording with a retro-soul sound, one that, unquestionably, Jones has contributed to popularizing, especially in the UK BUT that Jones isn't necessarily poised to capitalize on in the same way that younger, artists are.

And though Winehouse's songwriting is certainly part of her appeal, I very much think that public reaction to her would be very different if she wasn't White and/or Jewish. It's not ALL about race. But that's an element, no doubt.

But I don't think Jones singing Winehouse songs would equal similar success (I'm not sure why it's so difficult to imagine that happening by the way). That's probably more a consequence of age than anything else but hey, maybe Jones should find some new songwriters and we can test this theory out.

March 20, 2007, 7:31:23 AM PDT

– Like – Reply



JL3

I think asking whether Sharon Jones would have sold out the Roxy is not a fair question. This is not because I feel that we should shy away from analyzing the way prejudices function in determining what music is popular, but because although they are sharing the same backing band, Sharon Jones and Amy Winehouse differ quite a bit musically. Amy Winehouse has a modern sounding style despite the elements of retro soul, whereas Sharon Jones is basically making music that would sounds as though she could have been in the James Brown Revue. I think the lyrical content also plays into this.

There is little doubt that if Sharon Jones was singing Amy Winehous songs, she would be as successful due to her age and race. However, since it is difficult to imagine Jones singing Winehouse songs, there is too great a difference to fairly pit the two against each other.

(Just to give an example, Nicole Willis would be more of a fair comparison to Sharon Jones)

March 20, 2007, 6:20:30 AM PDT

– Like – Reply



Debs

I'm fascinated with Amy as an artist, so I will travel through different genres with her. I think for now novelty does suit her better than gimmicky.

Sharon Jones and the Dap Kings epitomize funky soul and that's not going to change. Before I buy Amy, I appreciated the inadvertent reminder to buy Sharon first.

Please put that follow up post together. I need help sorting out the social and racial relevance of all.

March 20, 2007, 5:17:57 AM PDT

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SdC

Glad to read this... Indeed the Dap-Kings deserve much respect for their sound.
In the same "tradition" Nicole Willis is less showy, but Keep reachin' up is a good album

March 20, 2007, 3:17:40 AM PDT

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