

Having been brought up by musically gifted parents and named after legendary gospel singer Mahalia Jackson; it's almost no surprise that Mahalia Burkmar took an interest in music at an early age. Initially stuck on how to express her feelings towards her first childhood crush, Burkmar, encouraged by her family, found her solace in songwriting and after picking up a pen to write a love song at the tender age of 12, she soon landed her first professional recording contract just one year later, aged 13.

# Mahalia

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It's due to her signing that Burkmar feels she grew up much earlier than her classmates. Constantly having to balance the mundane reality of completing her GCSE's alongside the prospect of a longstanding career as a successful music artist, forced the young musician into an untimely maturity and it shows. The singer, of Irish-Jamaican heritage, admits that in hindsight, she vastly underestimated the magnitude of her choice to sign to Asylum in 2012 and just how that decision would come to affect her life both personally, professionally and mentally. "I constantly felt this kind of invisible pressure to always be working or at least feel busy a lot of the time," Burkmar reveals. As time has passed, she realises that her decision was bigger than she first thought, but doesn't at all feel like she missed out on her childhood because of it, "Don't worry, I still had lots of fun" she assures me in a cheery tone.

Having attended a performing arts school, Burkmar recollects the difficulties that came with always being surrounded by other talented and like-minded people her own age who also wanted to "make it." "I used to think jealousy only existed for physical things like somebody's looks or their clothes or money" she recalls. "But I was wrong."

Even over the phone, it seems that Burkmar has recently undergone a significant time of self-reflection, speaking of her past with a credence and nostalgia that makes her sound double her age. Burkmar relays the story of how her mum had tried to caution her of the possible tensions her success could cause her at school, but being young and somewhat naive, she failed to heed her mother's warning. The

dress WEEKDAY  
puffer LIGHT BEFORE DARK  
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top MINNANHUI HUI  
earrings MAWI

hair & makeup Gigi Hammond @ Frank Agency using NARS Cosmetics

BOA graduate recalls being unable to keep a steady group of friends at the time, “I don’t know if that’s because people thought I thought I was better or what,” she recalls. “Some people might actually have been jealous of me,” says Burkmar, knowing she’d never have admitted that at the time. “Crazy.” She mutters.

Now with her education out of the way, Burkmar needed to let the world know she was coming. Having built up an impressive portfolio of live performances through supporting acts such as Emeli Sande, Lianne La Havas, Kehlani and even label-mate Ed Sheeran, Burkmar has already been on countrywide tours and sung at huge festivals, including Latitude and Glastonbury and is set to go on tour with former Notion cover star, Mabel McVey this autumn.

Despite the elongated breaks she needed to fulfil her academic commitments, Burkmar’s still managed to sporadically release quality projects such as *Head Space* in 2012 and the melancholy, piano-led single ‘Borrowers’ in 2015, from her self-written and released EP *Never Change*. The extended play, despite being a mere four tracks long, succinctly displays the singer’s growth. It also features production from Grammy award winning Stephen Fitzmaurice, as well as ‘Hotline Bling’ creator Anthony Jefferies, AKA Nineteen85.

Burkmar explains that she first got put into contact with Drake’s producer through her label, Asylum records, who she thanks for “opening doors [she] probably couldn’t have opened on [her] own.” The few days she had in the studio with the ‘One Dance’ producer became one of Burkmar’s “favourite musical experiences to date.” An adorable childlike excitement creeps into Burkmar’s otherwise soft and sensible voice when she describes being flown out to Miami to work on the record. “It was amazing.” Two years on, *Never Change* remains an understated yet highly lauded body of work that’s credited with giving the world its first glimpse at the true extent of Burkmar’s writing ability.

As she explains how she was brought up listening to the rich, timeless voices of the likes of Ella

Fitzgerald, Nina Simone and Sade Adu, Burkmar’s ‘old-soul’ style and wisdom beyond her years begins to make some sense. “I started writing because I seemed to feel things so deeply, and I still do,” she says, describing the genesis of her art. “It all started with this boy, I really fancied him, and I just didn’t know what else to do with all these emotions I was feeling at 12 or 13.”

However, despite her distinct soul and R&B inspirations, Burkmar scoffs at the very idea of herself being labelled by an outsider. “Everyone’s calling me this R&B sensation,” she chuckles sarcastically, “can you believe it?” Vehemently refusing to be pigeonholed by neither label nor critic, Burkmar tips her hat to her star sign, Taurus, for granting her the unfaltering determination and strength of character she prides herself on. “In this industry, you have to know what you want,” she says, “you have to be the head chef in your own kitchen, otherwise – what’s the point?”

When asked to name artists she dreams of collaborating with, Burkmar immediately names the late Amy Winehouse and Chicago-born Chance the Rapper as her top two choices. Her mind then wanders as she begins reminiscing longingly about the time she stood attentively, completely unfazed by the heavy rain whilst watching Bon Iver’s headline performance at Latitude festival.

According to Burkmar, the American folk band has been a staple part of her musical diet since her early schooldays initially drawn to their “raw” faultless vocals and adherence to the simple truth. Brutal honesty and unembellished depictions of reality are just two qualities of Bon Iver’s that Burkmar seeks out in a collaboration and also effortlessly exhibits in her own music.

‘Sober’, Burkmar’s latest single and personal favourite song of the moment, exists as a perfect example of this. The song, produced by musician and friend Maths Times Joy, details the all-too-common modern-day scenario of irresponsibly drunk-texting a prospective love interest and coming to regret it.

Stressing the importance of the melancholy and the mundane, Burkmar explains how it’s important that all the

songs she writes bare some manner of truth about her or the people around her. “It’s the day-to-day stuff that makes songs relatable and that’s what’s most important to me in my music – that people can relate.” However, nothing really shows off Burkmar’s vast arsenal of talents quite like her first, full-length project to date.

‘Diary of Me’ introduces Burkmar as both a talented singer-songwriter and competent visual storyteller. Having co-directed the music videos for a number of the tracks, Burkmar describes how she felt the need to have the final say on the creative direction of the project due to just how personal it was. “Making this [*Diary of Me*] was such an intimate process for me,” she says, “it just wouldn’t have felt right if [the] majority of the ideas didn’t then come from my own head.” Therefore, the aptly named *Diary of Me* is an insightful, autobiographical musical journal narrating the self-told story of Mahalia Burkmar.

The 10-track mixtape walks the listener through the past few years of her young life starting with ‘17’, the salient, acoustic intro to the project, celebrating Burkmar’s coming of age and the coinciding liberation she felt after finally choosing to say good riddance to bad rubbish. Following on, ‘Silly Girl’ recounts the ins and outs of a schoolyard dispute before going on to speak on wider issues of cyber-bullying, racism and homophobia.

Aside from the enchanting visuals and honey-like vocals, perhaps the most endearing quality of *Diary of Me* is the fact that majority of the songs on Burkmar’s mixtape could only have been written after having harnessed the power of hindsight.

Acquiring the ability to document one’s own life so personally yet almost completely objectively is a living testament to the transcendence of Mahalia Burkmar from a starry-eyed schoolgirl with a dream, to the confident, discerning musician she is today. What mark she’ll leave on music is yet to be revealed, but if the critics are to be believed, Mahalia has a bright future ahead of her.