

LIRA

South Africa's Afro Soul Queen



Lira set a soul scorching benchmark with her 2006 album **FEEL GOOD** – and with her late 2008 release, **SOUL IN MIND** she's once again created a record that is defined by its honesty, soulfulness, femininity and utter joyfulness. What's more, the 29-year-old has also delivered an album that effortlessly shows Lira's growth over the past two years – most especially as a songwriter and intuitive performer, turning the young girl who showed the first glimpses of her gift more than five years ago into a woman with a world class talent. "I think the album is the sound of a woman getting into her own skin, of finding her own creative voice and exploring the music that people heard on 'Feel Good' but taking it much deeper," Lira explains. Importantly, however, that "taking it deeper" is never at the expense of alienating her audience: instead Lira has, in **SOUL IN MIND**, crafted an album that will fold itself into the hearts of listeners, offering the warmth and comfort of someone who instinctively knows how to convey life's big themes in a way that instantly resonates.

SOUL IN MIND is a perfect example of this. Its lyrics may be potently personal (“I am a child born of love/so let love remain in my heart and my mind/let love enjoy be my friend/give me peace with no end/let me live with no fear and no shame/let me begin to see love come alive come alive in my life/let me feel how it feels to be me”) but Lira delivers them with such intensely felt emotions that it’s impossible not to feel how they intersect with your own life. When Lira sings “I want it all”, all the desires of her fans will be swept along with her, caught in the slipstream of this gifted artist’s musical power.

For Lira ‘**Soul In Mind**’ is the album’s key track. “It’s a very sincere song and it the one song that gave birth to everything else on the album,” she says Lira may be a South African style icon, and a young woman who relishes the playful aspects of living, but she thinks deeply about life – and the responsibility of being an artist with a now established fanbase.

“My music has to be empowering,” Lira says, with real force. “I am very, very conscious of that – especially growing up in Africa. I don’t want to bring anything negative into my music yet do that in way that is not preachy.” That Lira has been successful at her goal is easily heard in one of the album’s standout tracks – ‘**Rise Again**’. A classic pop track that quickly burns into your heart with effortless hook and words that snag in all the right places, the lyrics (“Still I rise again/Yet I rise again/Yes I rise again/And yet I rise again”) in many ways define the experience of living in Africa: at times it seems impossibly hard but the continent always surges back. ‘**Rise Again**’ was composed by Lira alone – and its impact says a great deal about how she’s grown as a songwriter. “If you are a songwriter at your creative core, you never stop writing and since the release of FEEL GOOD I have been writing lyrics, melodies – all to work at my craft. Even now I am still writing songs.”

Another song that carries Lira’s signature songwriting style is ‘**My Company**’, an achingly beautiful, but simple song that allows the spotlight to fall on Lira alone: Although co-written by Grant Tregellas, it sees Lira unmasked in a song that is as moving a love song as you’re likely to hear all year. Lira describes **SOUL IN MIND** as “a personal prayer” about wanting to feel the joy in life – but there are a handful of songs on the album that do step into life’s darker edges including ‘**Hamba**’. A song about realising that your partner is simply not the one for you, ‘Hamba’s’ heart-catching refrain turns it into an album highlight.

Although Lira’s music is frequently described as Afro-Soul, the diversity on **SOUL IN MIND** makes such classifications less easy this time around. “I need the freedom to express myself through my music and so am not bound to a genre when working on an album,” Lira says. “But there is a common thread through the songs and that is that they are honest – the come from my soul.” So there is ‘**S’thandwa Sam**’ (“my Kasi song about a girl wondering why her ‘boyfriend’ won’t declare their relationship publicly”), the old school sound of ‘**Made For Me**’, her out-and-out girly song ‘**It’s Alright**’ and the unashamedly upbeat ‘**Celebrating Life**’ which is made for the dancefloor. Lira’s especially pleased with the way **SOUL IN MIND** has turned out but

admits that creating the album was not always easy. “With FEEL GOOD I had time to really commit to being in the studio and work consistently at the songs, but this time around we had to fit the recording around live appearances and other commitments and it was hard.

“My biggest challenge at the moment is maintaining a balance in my life. At times I do get down and berate myself because everyone knows me as the ‘Feel Good’ girl but life is made up both sides, the dark and the light, and if the dark makes you grow more in the light, you are living life to the full.”

Lira pays tribute to her band members – several of whom have cowritten songs with her – for turning **SOUL IN MIND** into the astonishing album that it is. “It was wonderful recording with my live band and I believe we have created something special here.”

Victor Mngomezulu (keyboards), Tshepo Sekele (bass), Grant Tregellas (guitars) and Joshua Zacheus (drums) form the core of Lira’s band and as well as playing a pivotal role on **SOUL IN MIND**, they have accompanied her on the growing number of high-profile and important live dates that she has notched up since the release of FEEL GOOD.

The latter album has proved a potent calling card for Lira, unleashing several hit songs which remain perennial radio favourites, including the title track. FEEL GOOD has been released in Italy and Thailand and the past year has seen Lira’s sound go international with live dates in Italy, Fiji and more. Here at home, she remains one of the country’s premier live performers, having appeared at the Joy of Jazz, the recent Macufe Festival, Oppikoppi and the 2007 Cape Town International Jazz Festival. “It was after that festival that I realized just how my music affects people from all different backgrounds because I suddenly started getting fanmail from people all over the world. It’s very gratifying.”

For Lira’s multitude of fans, a new album from the artist is as gratifying – and in **SOUL IN MIND** they have been given a gift of a record that provides the perfect companion to FEEL GOOD and has classic written all over it.

AWARDS & NEWS

Lira has amassed an impressive collection of accolades in recent years. These honours pay tribute to her across the spheres of music, fashion and charity. They include:

South African Fashion Icon – Cape Town Fashion Festival 2008

Winner South African Music Award (SAMA) for:

Most down loaded song – Feel Good 2008

Best Music Video – Ixesha 2008

Best Music Video – Feel Good 2007

Best Jazz Album – Metro Awards 2007

Lira caused a sensation at this year's South African Music Awards

She was nominated for 6 South African Music Awards for 2009. She finally won in the following categories, making her the most decorated winner of this year's SAMA awards:

Best adult contemporary album: English,

Best remix of the year,

Best Female Artist

Album of the Year- Soul In Mind

Best male artist artist this year is Abdulla Ibrahim.

In November 2009 Lira will come on tour to Europe.

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