



ANGIE STONE

No More Rain in Her Cloud

by Perdita Savage Belk

Her debut album, *Black Diamond*, went platinum. Her newest project, *Mahogany Soul*, is slated for release in early November, though she's already on tour promoting it and past hits. All in a day's work for self-taught singer, songwriter and keyboardist Angie Stone who was discovered by record label owner Sylvia Robertson at the Township Auditorium in Columbia when she was a mere teen.

"My parents initially said no to the idea of my moving to New York," remembers then not-yet-18 only child of a musician father and nurse mother who started out singing gospel at First Nazareth Baptist Church in Columbia. "But they later changed their mind, realizing this was my dream. Plus, Mom had girded me in church with the Word, so she knew I was ready." After five years with female rap trio The Sequence, Stone's first real claim to fame came as lead singer of Vertical Hold, where she crooned for 12 years. Then the time came for her to spread her wings.

"I think it's different stages...you grow, you graduate," reflects the sultry songstress of her decision to go solo. "But it was scary, because I was used to having someone beside me." Going solo was obviously the right decision, with "Black Diamond" being released in 1999, receiving within three months Billboard magazine critics' album of the year award, and selling over 700,000 copies. "I named 'Black Diamond' after my beautiful daughter Diamond," Stone revealed in an article with Peep Magazine, "and the record literally helped me to heal emotionally and allowed me to let go of so much that I've gone through in my life."

Gone through? It's hard to imagine that this stellar songwriting poetess, who has penned lyrics for Mary J. Blige, Diana Ross, Erykah Badu, and D'Angelo, could have known anything but sweet success. But life has thrown her a few curves. As the single mother of Diamond, 17, and Michael, 4, the C.A. Johnson alumna admits that the balancing act can be tricky. "You can't really do it all. When I'm away from my children, I miss them.

Having to be a mom and a dad and serve as sole provider is hard." Fortunately, she gets a lot of help from her mom now, who takes care of her children when she travels.

But Stone is handlin' her business—literally. Legendary former Arista Records music exec and CEO of J Records Clive Davis gave Stone her own company under which she now records. "It's a blessing," says Stone. "I'm working with a young male artist, Calvin" who appears in duet with Stone on *Mahogany Soul*. Stone is feeling good about her career, actually "happy, because if you'd asked me in 1979, I wouldn't have said I have the winning ingredients." But a more confident Stone now professes, "it's easy sailing. I understand where my career is going, and I don't worry about record sales. I'm so blessed and happy that at some point in my life, I wasn't judged by my looks, age or color."

But Stone knew that she would have to pay her dues. Early in her career, she stashed away extra money to demo her own material.

Being extremely prolific at songwriting, "I constantly write down phrases that I think will work in a song." It wasn't long before the music industry noticed her, however, she didn't start at the top. Gigs included a spell as saxophone player and backup vocalist for Lenny Kravitz and backup vocals for D'Angelo— both who later served as co-producers on "Black Diamond." Her efforts have not gone unnoticed by the often unmerciful critics and press. The New York Times proclaimed Stone as "A new soul queen!" while urban hip-hop magazine *The Source* credits that "Angie's listeners are nothing but rewarded" referencing the "old school" feeling cuts from "Black Diamond."

Stone was by no means a wallflower during her Columbia days. Writing poetry, practicing the sax, and playing sports dominated a very active childhood for the "older-than-30, not-yet-40" soul-stirrer. Her performing career

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actually started in her bedroom, where Stone would perform "mirror concerts" to the recordings of her idols— Marvin Gaye, Smokey Robinson and Aretha Franklin.

Now in a more career reflective stage, Stone is looking down the road— to where she wants to be. "I'm not at

the point in my career where I'm completely calling all of the shots," she candidly shares. "You know, where I can take a year off or so. But I'm giving myself another year. I'll get there." Stone also openly reveals that funk isn't the only sound present in her music. She believes and says her music is all "preparation for God's purpose" and that her gospel beginnings will always be a part of her.

Now calling New Jersey home, Stone is looking toward the future— and what it holds for her. Though she loves the music scene, she envisions using her poetic talents in other forms of entertainment. "I see myself doing movies and theater work," muses Stone, whose immediate family still resides in South Carolina, "and writing a book" probably sharing her varied life, love, and career experiences.

A right-on-time goal for a lady whose time has come. ■



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