

# Loving you

The CD spinning furiously in my Discman, Juliet Kelly's debut album *Aphrodite's Child*, (33 Records) is so hot off the press that you can still see the print drying. Juliet's full-bodied, richly complex vocal timbre, combining a honeyed sweetness with flashes of steel, first came to the jazz world's attention in December last year with a high-profile support slot for Carmen Lundy at the Queen Elizabeth Hall. Fate decreed that Juliet was to become a big noise on the South Bank and not in the City: with a degree in economics the singer is that rarest of creatures, a musician who can happily do her own accounts. But knowing that she also had a strong religious background had she, I wondered, sung in church when she was growing up?

'Strangely, although I grew up in a strictly religious household, where all non-religious music was banned, I never sang in church. I was forced by my parents to go to church every Sunday until I was 16, but though I can look back now with hindsight and know that I regularly heard some excellent gospel music, I was never really into it. Instead my early influences came from the chart music that I listened to secretly in my bedroom – Sade, Soul II Soul and Michael Jackson being some of my favourites. Although I now concentrate mainly on original songs

It's early days for singer **Juliet Kelly** who has just released a debut album steeped in the jazz heritage, with a taste for Greek mythology. Her talent is clear, says **Peter Quinn**

these influences are still evident. On the album we do a version of Sade's 'Your Love Is King', and live performances include songs by others such as Soul II Soul and Des'ree. Like me, these artists are all British.



Although there is much inspiration to be taken from American artists, and the American songbook in particular, I feel an affinity with the experience of British artists that draws me to their work.

'When people ask me to describe my music I never know what to say. I'm sure that like everyone I'm influenced by many different styles and various musicians that I've listened to through the years, but

it's really hard for me to look at my music objectively and see any obvious similarities. I came up with the term "acoustic groove" to describe my sound, as it seemed to be a vague enough term but at the same time it's also an accurate description. My music is acoustic and most of the songs have a definite groove. I think that's because the way I write usually starts from a bass line and then develops from there: actually the bass is my first love. Although I took piano lessons as a child and studied up to Grade V, I thought of them as a chore and stopped as soon as I could, using my schoolwork as an excuse. It was only later when I was at university that I decided to get back into music and, as a fan of Marcus Miller, decided I would learn to play the bass guitar. However, I didn't last very long – three weeks in fact – when I realised that playing the bass didn't come to me as easily as I'd hoped. Because I'd enrolled at a music workshop I decided to transfer to another class. Singing seemed the obvious move to me, principally because it meant I didn't have to go out and buy another instrument! Singing in that class was the first time I'd ever sung in public and I thought I'd collapse from nerves. But the teacher was very encouraging and said she thought I had a natural talent.'

After taking private lessons for a year and being introduced to the music of jazz divas such as Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan and Carmen McRae, Juliet then decided to step things up a gear. She applied for