



THAT'S THE WAY LOVE SOUNDS

Love as seen through the eyes of an up-and-coming acoustic soul sister

By Matthew D. Ford

It's the last day of school for students across the city of Detroit. Summer has arrived and love floats in the atmosphere, preparing to release its bows and arrows. The sounds of acoustic guitars humming the tunes of liberation and romance can be heard from stages and parks from Venice to New York.

On the day that love and freedom hitched up a band and toured the world, I left school and walked a block east to the New Center Pavilion on the corner of Grand Boulevard and Second Street. A young woman calls me asking for directions to the New Center Pavilion and after a few minutes, she—with a blue guitar case strapped across her, while accompanied by another young woman—walks down the concrete steps toward me.

Her name is Charity Ward, a new acoustic soul singer reminiscent of a female version of John Mayer or the kind of artist you would find on Vh1's *You Oughta Know* new music series. The accompanying lady is her sister.

She responds to my first question with a high degree of thoughtfulness and gratitude, on her life in preparation for the release of her debut album *Sounds Like Love*. At the moment, she's very busy encountering adjustments as she is used to being a student, working at her job and making music part time—and that's just the tip of the iceberg. There are more performances, interviews and appearances, but she adds, "I enjoy life more just because everything I'm doing revolves around music, which is ultimately what I love most."

Charity started playing guitar at 13 but has been singing "since before [she] knew when" with her sister. "Music has a really special healing element" for her and for those who hear it, the impact is brilliant. She says that it would almost be wrong to forsake that gift and not share it.

The young singer cites "old school" music with harmonies, the '70s and Motown, including her father's love for the Temptations and her family's appreciation for Stevie Wonder "as an artist and a musician." Currently, her favorites are Corrine Bailey Rae and John Mayer, who make their music "sound like love," as well as Anthony David, an independent artist who "capitalized" the music industry and stayed true to himself (which she hopes to learn for herself).

So, what exactly does love sound like?

“Love is like Thanksgiving dinner once all my uncles, aunties and cousins have arrived and there’s a little bit of Marvin Gaye playing in the background and a little bit of laughter mixed in with that,” linking summertime to love, like on her song “Soulful Saturday”.

Charity elaborates, love sounds like “listening to rain from the inside of the house” — a lyric from the bridge of her album’s eponymous song — “a moment in which you feel loved, but you can attach an audible quality to it. We listen to Stevie Wonder a lot on Sunday mornings and just turn it up real loud and are just so *amazed* by what he’s able to do musically and we’re just like ‘*whoa!*’ There’s no way you can really explain it. That’s love.”

She also says that love is the most tangible and valuable emotion to encounter, like summer in July, euphoria, a feeling she strives to create with her music.

When asked about *Sounds Like Love*’s production, the songs were already written based on her guitar and a melody — “not produced-up, commercial music.” That’s what makes her music different, too, as it doesn’t sound “synthetic” like a lot of radio music.

The singer-songwriter explains that “guitar enables you to write music a little better,” where chords lead to melodies and melodies lead to lyrics. She doesn’t write music in the sense that she sits down and tries to think of something clever to put on paper. She says, “I can honestly say that I have never written something that wasn’t genuine to me.”

On her life and how its events influence her music, she pauses at first and thinks. She has encountered abandonment, vacuums and empty spaces, believing in somebody and being disappointed to the point of disbelief. In turn, she writes and sings about it.

The album is dedicated to Darren J. Hampton, an extremely close family friend and brother she knew for six years. He introduced Charity to recording in a studio setting and worked with her on a guitar track on his last project. He was planning to release an EP or album entitled *Welcome to Love*, parallel to Charity’s *Sounds Like Love*, but passed away in March of 2011.

I ask her to sing before concluding the interview. She proceeds to the concrete stage facing the Pavilion and warms up. Before she starts to perform, a passerby asks what we’re doing and she tells him that she’s a singer, gives him her name and advertises herself on iTunes.

Young artists must promote themselves, right?

She begins to strum notes on her guitar and sings her first single from the album. In a soft, soulful way, you can tell that she’s into the music. It sounds like love, like July, like summertime in Detroit.

At the end of a great interview on the subject of love, seasons and life, the music resonates with someone in one way or another. This 20-year-old soul sister has a lot to say about the art of love with a simplicity that suggests that she knows what she's talking about and has enough uncles, aunties, cousins and Stevie Wonder lyrics and melodies to back it up.

She will be opening for P.J. Morton on June 29 at the Jazz Café at the Music Hall (tickets available at Ticketmaster) and on July 16 at the Concert of Colors at the Orchestra Hall. You can follow her on Twitter @CharityClef and visit her website charityward.com. Her album *Sounds Like Love* is due for an August release.