

Rising & Top

Pop With A Lebanese Soul

Therese Neaime is the latest Pop Soul sensation to come out of Europe. The Swedish-Lebanese singer speaks to **Salma Zohud** about her chart-topping success.

You are quickly rising as a star. How did it all start?

Therese Neaime: I started as a dancer when I was six years old. As I was growing up, I participated in many stage dances and won dance contests. I began singing gospel at 15 and started to take singing lessons from a professional vocals teacher. Afterwards I started as a background singer and artist for several singers around the world.

How do you manage with your own record label?

TN: I started my own company called Future Records because I didn't want to sit and wait for anyone. No one knows where the record business is going. A lot of independent artists have set-up their own record label. I think it is great because I have a final say in everything. If you could get the right promotion and people to believe in you, it's great.

You need a good distribution network and people helping you along the way. I have Universal Music which distributes my music.

You are building quite a productive career – dancing, singing, producing music and even acting. That must be challenging.

TN: When you live in LA everything kind of blends together – the dancing, the singing and the acting. It is Hollywood. Coincidentally, I was touring with my live band performing in different places when someone saw me during a live gig and thought I should sign up with an acting agency.

How do you define your music?

TN: My music is Soul Pop. The album has different flavours. It is kind of commercial but it is not too Pop as much as it has a good Soul feel. It is more crossover where people liked it in Sweden and Lebanon. Also in Los Angeles where I performed live and it had that groove.

Commercial does not necessarily mean it's dreadful mainstream music. The term can be applied to many great musicians.

TN: I agree. It doesn't have to be Britney Spears Pop to be commercial. Look at the older artists like Sade – they were commercial – they had their own style. I am not trying to be something that I am not. I am not Whitney Houston. I am Therese and my voice is what it is.

So Sade is your influence?

TN: I love Sade and Natalie Imbruglia. I appreciate singer-songwriters with a message in their lyrics. For me the message is the most important.

What is your message?

TN: A lot of my songs have a confident vibe – you can do whatever you want. You can succeed in life if you work hard enough. Of course, you can feel vulnerable on stage and leave out some personal stuff, but also people should listen to your lyrics if you have something to say. If you explain to people about your song before you perform on stage, people will listen more and you can reach them with your message.

What difficulties did you face trying to get to where you are now?

TN: My strength is that I never try to put on a certain style. The lyrics come from the heart, they are from my life. On my debut album *Living*, released in 2006, I had songs that I had made in 1999. I didn't rush to write all the songs in one month to make an album. I think people can feel that it's been a long process and that my songs are made from the heart and real experiences.

The key is not to say I am going to be in the dance market or pop market. The song is me and that makes the album genuine.

Are you planning to tour the Middle East?

TN: I would love to come. I toured for three years in LA, San Diego and around the States, so my live band Neaime is ready.

Do you have any plans to sing in Arabic or Swedish?

TN: Not in Swedish, although it is my main language. It is not universal. I am singing a bit in Arabic now. I do blend in some Arabic words like *habibi* and *inshallah* in some of my remixes. In the future I am planning to sing in Arabic – it is a bigger market and it is closer to the heart.

You also are very much involved in philanthropic work, working for children with cancer.

TN: My mother passed away four years ago and I wanted to do something good. That's why I became an ambassador for The Foundation for Children with Cancer. Sometimes we do concerts in their aid and we visit hospitals with other celebrities.

So what is your ultimate goal?

TN: The main goal is not to be famous. My main goal is to live from my music. To be on stage and sing my songs – that is beautiful. ☑

