**SABINA DDUMBA**

Music’s latest breaking headline could be about the romantic travails of a global star or a young pop icon accidentally stuck in a spot of social media-generated controversy, but it’s unlikely to focus upon the power of the song.

Yet there are moments when four minutes of music tells its own story. When Swedish soul artist Sabina Ddumba released Scarred For Life, it connected on an international scale. Between the strength of her vocal – a tidal wave of tender emotion and fragility – and the blunt honesty of the lyrics (“You really fucked me up this time”), it delivered a sentiment that so many people of disparate backgrounds could relate to.

Scarred For Life consequently carried its own weight as its reach moved internationally with glowing attention courtesy of the likes of The Line of Best Fit, Pop Matters, Clash and Hillydilly. Sabina has even recently been named as one of Spotify’s Ones to Watch in 2015.

“I wasn’t really thinking about it in terms of how successful it would be,” admits the twenty-year-old. “I hoped it would do well but I was just content to go with the flow. So when people from abroad were telling me that they appreciated the track, I was happy and relieved more than surprised.”

It’s a track that almost didn’t happen given that it had sat unloved at the back of Sabina’s songbook for so long. But when she heard it again, she was transfixed and realised that she just needed to give herself to the song a little more to allow it to fulfil its potential. Surprisingly, its attention-grabbing lyric wasn’t actually a paean to lost love.

Recorded at a time in which she was experiencing numerous challenges in different aspect of her life, it was a song that acted as composite of her experiences, like “creating one person from all these bad things that have happened to you.” She continues: “It’s more about my relationship with myself. One side of you wants to do something and you keep telling yourself that you’re going to do it, and yet you keep letting yourself down. I had no-one else to blame but me.” Fortunately happier times were just around the corner, which carried an added benefit of inspiring her next single Effortless.

“The difference between Scarred For Life and Effortless is that I met a guy,” she coos. “Everything’s so easy in this relationship and everything’s so good because we’re committed to each other and we want the same thing which makes it so easy.” In fact, she’s so deliriously happy that their relationship has informed other new songs too, including Loyal Royal and a swift rebuttal to the couple’s detractors with Not Too Young.

Much of Sabina’s work since the release of Scarred For Life has been focused on working on new material. Working in Los Angeles was a culture shock compared to the more relaxed approach that she experienced back in Stockholm, but it’s nothing that she couldn’t triumph over. Working on Effortless in London alongside Michael Angelo (Sam Smith, Ella Ayre) and Ali Tennant (Jessie J, JLS) was a more straightforward experience.

Despite Sweden producing so many internationally recognised artists across a range of genres over many years, it’s not a nation that’s renowned for producing soul musicians. Sabina holds a distinct advantage in that regard. After years in a gospel choir based in Tensta on the outskirts of Stockholm, such music is embedded deep within her consciousness.

“I’ve been so positively affected by gospel, I just can’t do without it,” she affirms. “It’s part of me, whatever I do it’s there.” Her experiences with the choir also allowed her a few claims to fame: together they twice performed at Sweden’s Grammis Awards, and she even contributed backing vocals to Katy Perry’s hit Walking on Air.

While gospel and soul are her main inspirations, Sabina also picks Lauryn Hill and Janelle Monáe as contemporary artists that she admires. Importantly, however, she’s keen to reiterate that she’s very much her own person. “You have to be who you are. Take it or leave it. I accept that I am who I am, and I can’t be anyone else.”

As for her aims and ambitions for the future?

“To conquer the world! No, I’m kidding… actually, no I’m not,” she replies, almost debating the idea with herself. “But a plan? I’m not the sort of person who likes to make big plans in case I’m disappointed. I just want to play music, release music and travel. I believe in God and I believe in destiny, so if something’s meant to happen it will. And I’ll be ready for it!”