

# Rhythm *Without* Blues

The Dichotomy of a Music Genre

DR. SYLEECIA THOMPSON

# Rhythm Without Blues

*The Dichotomy of a Music Genre*

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**Dr. Syleecia Thompson**



**Strategic Book Publishing**

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*This book is dedicated to the soul of Rhythm and Blues music and all of the artists who have tried to provide the music industry with music of substance, melodies of inspiration, and spirited lyrics. To Gerald Levert, James Brown, and Michael Jackson, whom we lost during the creation of this book and were major pioneers in R&B, Pop, and Soul music—this book was inspired by their work. A special dedication goes out to one of the greatest female R&B performers, writers, and singers of our time, Syleena Johnson—in part this book is inspired by you. The Labor Pains you have endured will pay off One Day, and The Voice will be heard. Your music will always be Faithful to You as long as your heart is Still Open to it.*



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# Foreword

Hello, reader. Can I talk candidly to you? You may have an idea of what you are about to read, but do you really know the informational treat that is in store for you? *Rhythm Without Blues* is everything the industry has been thinking but won't say. The words that will jump off the page at you are those of industry veterans who have lived to see the high points and the low valleys of R&B. They've succeeded and fallen and succeeded again. They have been behind the scenes with all of the industry politics and still have had to put a smile on their faces for the camera so that you (the devoted fans) wouldn't know that it was all going downhill. They remained optimistic and found ways to survive the drastic changes that will forever affect Rhythm and Blues.

If you are a fan of Rhythm and Blues, I would like to speak to you first. There was a time when your radio was your friend and you would spend quality time just letting your radio play and it felt like your own personal DJ had taken over the station because every song was "Your Song." You could clean the whole house and not notice that you had been swimming in Pine-Sol for two hours. Remember riding in your car with the windows down and singing along with Luther even if you didn't know all the words? And you didn't even care who saw or heard you! You are a fan of the music, not just a celebrity following gossip hound. You want to hear *Songs in the Key of Life*. You want Mint Condition. You want George Benson and Gladys Knight (with or without the Pips is optional) followed by a little bit of Minnie Ripperton. You want the MUSIC and that's all you care about because it makes you feel good. It gives you a message, it makes you dance, and it gives you hope. This is what music is supposed to do. This is what R&B does for you. The radio today is different. You almost feel

assaulted by the music that's on the radio now. You know the feeling. You're riding in your car with the radio on and you think to yourself, "What the hell am I listening to?" Even worse is when you catch yourself humming some song that you would never consciously sing and you realize that you are being brainwashed just like the masses. You don't want to be sheep but here you are Baaa Baaaa-ing. You want R&B back and I feel you.

If you are an artist and you feel like you want to jump in the deep end of the pool that we call the music industry, I'd like to speak to you next. You grew up listening to Al Green, Patti Labelle, Stevie, and Donnie so your taste in music is totally ignored in this current climate. What's worse is that you feel that there is no place for you in the music business. People say things like your sound is "too old" or even "too soulful." You write songs about real emotions and life's journey and they tell you that no one wants to hear that. But your research tells you that every time you pull your band out to perform, the room goes nuts! Who are these "no ones" that these industry execs speak of? Obviously anyone with an ear and a soul can feel what you're singing about, and on top of that, you are a "real" singer that will give the world goose bumps if just given a chance. I have seen this tragic clash of talent versus what "they" think will sell a million times over. It's a sad state of affairs when a label will push a bubble gum artist and shelve the talent without giving even the weakest of support. How do you continue to push in an industry that clearly is trying its hardest to keep you out? How do you make a way out of no way at all? You have fears that add to the already high pressure of succeeding in a highly competitive field because even if you do get a deal or national exposure, you don't know if the people that are suppose to be working for you really believe in you because you have Rhythm and Blues. Maybe we should all just use auto tune for every song and make dances. Don't fight it anymore. Stop singing from your soul like you've been doing all of your life and get to dancing. Is R&B dead or are we just being stubborn and fighting the future of music? *Rhythm Without Blues* is going to navigate you through your questions and give you an insider's point of view of what the state of Rhythm and Blues is today.

Here are a few things you should know. The first thing you should know is that you are in good hands with Dr. Syleecia Thompson. Her in-depth research and honesty from the inside out is second to none. Her rich history with R&B is generational, and her love for the genre unparalleled. She has a passion for R&B that drove her amongst all of

her other duties as a business partner, a student, and professor to write this book. I am more than impressed with her ability to multitask and excel at all of her endeavors. The other thing you should know is this. Syleecia is my friend. In an industry where too many people say one thing and mean another, I am so proud and blessed to have an “industry” friend like her. She's always said what she meant and meant what she said. There is no question as to whether or not she is really in your corner or not. There is no fake in her mainly because her face will tell you either way. With that being said: the truth will be told in this book. The research is thorough and the source is platinum. If you have purchased this manuscript, then you have taken one step closer to understanding more about the journey that is yours for the riding. The journey that is Rhythm and Blues. And throughout you will see the reason we are losing the heart and soul of our genre in this generation, and you will discover if we can rekindle the burning furnace that was once Rhythm and Blues. Yes, reader, you are in good hands. Enjoy.

L. Williams



# Acknowledgments

I would like to thank GOD for giving me the perseverance, strength, and stamina to finish this book. Galatians 6:9 states, “Be not weary in well doing, for in due season you shall reap what you sow, if you endureth.” This I have found to hold true.

To my family: My sisters, Sylette and Syleena; my mom, Brenda Thompson; my nephews, Tony, Brenden, and Kiwane Jr., Kiwane Sr., Michell Thompson, Sylvonna, Devonna and Pete, thanks for your kind words and support. Pastor Ferlander N. Lewis and First Lady Janice Lewis, of New Mt. Olive Baptist Church in Harvey, Illinois, thank you for your weekly inspirations. You may not know this but your sermons and overwhelming spirit of strength have encouraged me dearly. Syl Johnson, my father, thanks for your courage that enabled you to endure over forty years in the music business-your music lives today through Hip Hop. Dr. Bennett, Dr. Scarlett and Dr. Thakkar of Argosy University, thanks for your undivided attention and support. A special thanks to Pat Houston ([www.pathoustonphotography.com](http://www.pathoustonphotography.com)) for her unique skill of photography and for helping me make my photo's look fabulous! I would also like to thank the rest of my family and friends who gave me words of encouragement over the years.

Syleena Johnson, Mary J. Blige, R. Kelly, Anthony Hamilton, Tamia, Faith Evans, Musiqsoulchild, Lauryn Hill, Adina Howard, Tank, Jagged Edge, Nicci Gilbert, Brandy, Joe, Jazmine Sullivan, Lelah Hathaway, Alicia Keys, and all of the other R&B artists and producers who strive to promote, cultivate, and generate good music, this research is a representative of your interest, values, and beliefs. I would like to acknowledge all of the Record Label Staff, Managers,

and R&B artists who contributed to the research and making of this book. Although your identities are confidential, your voice will still be heard as you are now a part of history. Your interest, time, and dedication in your responses were greatly appreciated and inspirational for me.

Also, Nicci Gilbert from the dynamic trio, Brownstone and Larry Khan, EVP of Urban Marketing for Jive Records, thanks for your assistance and shrewd perception. A warm thank you to Toxic, Mickey “MeMpHiTz” Wright, French Spencer, Ralph De Palma, and everyone who contributed their time and energy. A special thanks to Mr. Michael “Blue” Williams, CEO of Family Tree Entertainment. Thanks for the last minute interview and highly informative answers. You inspire me. I would like to acknowledge and thank, R. Kelly, my friend and one of the greatest R&B artists of our time. Thank you for the last minute interview and being a strong voice to this book. Your thoughts, insight, and emotion are much appreciated. You truly are the King of R&B and no one can take that from you regardless of how hard they try.

To my dear friend, L. Williams, you betta work! Thank you for writing up my Foreword. I couldn't have found anyone to hit the points you hit. I will see you at the top, buddy! Let's get it.

A special acknowledgement goes to my true supporter, rock, and the love of my life, James Omar Fisher, who pushed me to finish this book and has provided me with great strength and an unbelievable amount of support. Thank you! We did it!

# 1

## Introduction

I think Rhythm and Blues, also known as R&B, has taken a brutal beating over the last twenty years. Beat down by the industry but also beaten by factors beyond its control. Rhythm and Blues is a dying genre. The disingenuous, hypocritical and insincere culture of the music industry has propelled me to uncover this epidemic. An epidemic describes something that is widespread, unraveling and problematic. That is where I feel the state of black music, particularly R&B, is headed towards, an epidemic. The fabric and storyline of R&B is still solid but the main characters and supporting cast are new and telling the wrong story.

This book is real. This book will educate those in the industry and those who want to enter it. My interviews are real and un-edited. I didn't want to base this book purely on my opinion; I wanted to hear from professional people that understand the music industry and have a pure passion and love for R&B. When I interviewed one of the great R&B singers of our time, R. Kelly, he felt differently. He said, "R&B lives." However, I question that assumption. How can R&B be living in an industry that does not support it, respect it, or promote it? Has R&B lost its feeling, momentum, and its substance? If so, why? I looked at record labels, particularly the Big 4, radio, the leaders/exec's, contracts, finances, the organization, the structure, marketing, promotion, the Hip Hop effect, the digital impact and

many other areas that may have contributed to the current state of R&B music and the industry as a whole.

I based this book on many factors. I interviewed artists, executives, producers, and industry insiders because I wanted to find out the truth. I wanted some questions answered. “How is R&B living in an industry that does not embrace real music?” What is the record labels’ role in supporting R&B artists? Why do we have Rhythm Without Blues? What is the Dichotomy of a Music Genre? With those questions, I examined, studied, and researched why we have Rhythm Without Blues in today’s illustrious and ever-growing billion dollar music industry. When I first came up with the title *Rhythm without Blues: The Dichotomy of a Music Genre*, I immediately thought, “Oh, this will be quite controversial.” Then, as I surpassed those feelings, I began to think about how this book is a much needed necessity for people who think they want to go into the industry and make R&B music. I began to think about all those music minded future executives who want to work for a major record label because they are passionate and love music. Finally, I thought about all those consumers who love R&B but are wondering why the music of today doesn’t inspire them like it did when they went to their first Anita Baker concert and she belted out “You Bring Me Joy.” So with that being the case, I thought to myself that although this book may offend some people and I may be ostracized and thrown completely out of the industry, it’s a much needed tool that will enlighten, inspire, and empower anyone who reads it. It is also for people who want to work in the industry and don’t understand the complexities and politics of it. The information in this book can be applied to other genres of music within the industry as well.

For me, it’s not just about giving back to the educational world or music environment but it’s about my pure love of the music. I can recall sitting and watching my sister, Syleena Johnson, in the studio writing great tunes and going into the booth and coming up with the coolest melodies I have ever heard. I was there when she recorded, “Another Relationship,” a song that sent me running to the bathroom to hide the tears that were in my eyes. Or, maybe it is about the time we witnessed the great Patti La Belle in the studio and how her voice was perfect and the same after thirty plus years in this industry. I can recall the first time I met Ronald Isley and I felt like I had just met the Pope. His voice is pure as white snow. Or, the first time I met Charlie Wilson at a studio and he just sang all night a cappella with a voice of pure distinction. I can’t forget those endless and sleepless nights at

the Chocolate Factory studio watching R. Kelly create songs from scratch and off the top of his head as he juggled between his album and many others. I can recall falling asleep in his studio session and being woken by him singing a gospel song he had just created. Not only did this wake me up out of my sleep, but there were tears in my eyes because of the passion and strength of his voice. I can't forget about my father, Syl Johnson, and his raspy and distinct sound. I use to sneak in the basement at our suburban home to hear him record some of his greatest songs in the late 1980s. I was just a child but I knew he had an awesome voice and would serve as a legend in today's music world. Today, he is heavily sampled by many great Hip Hop artists.

I have hundreds of stories that I could reveal. My credibility is strong! The love I have for R&B is real, not phony. When you read this book, you are not just learning about what the industry does and doesn't do for R&B music or its artists, but you are learning about my passionate endeavor to get the music back to its original intent: the ability to inspire, motivate, and move an individual. The passion for R&B has grown deeper inside me over the last ten years and my soul wishes it would just get better or maybe even back to the old Mavis Staples days. The grit in her voice, the passion in her tone was undeniable. R&B has a rich culture with not just me but the world around me.

One must realize that Rhythm and Blues music is vital to life and the social environment. Rhythm and Blues is one of the oldest forms of musical expressions that describes a culture and its struggles, as well as defines the fabric of a people. Music transcends cultures through diverse lyrics, meaningful messages, and various forms of rhythm. It provides people of all ages with joyful and oftentimes harmonious feelings of gratification and identification. So you ask yourself, "What is Rhythm Without Blues?" Stripping the *Blues from the Rhythm* creates *Rhythm Without Blues*. The blues in Rhythm and Blues gave the music soul, feeling, and depth. It told the story. You experienced exactly what the artist was going through just by listening to a particular R&B song. Think about Mary J. Blige; you feel her and understand her world just through the way she explains her struggles in her life. It is her delivery, feeling, and passion. Blues music describes pure feelings, emotion, and sends chills up your spine when you hear it. It makes you happy. Oftentimes, it makes you cry, but the bottom line is that it makes you feel something. Therefore, adding blues to the word Rhythm generated a movement. It can be called

Soul, Funk, Neo Soul, but it is all Rhythm and Blues. A term coined by Jerry Wexler in the 1940s, R&B made its impact on the Western world in a grand fashion. Rhythm and Blues born out of blues and gospel and lead a movement throughout the world.

Artists such as Donny Hathaway, Sam Cooke, Curtis Mayfield, Aretha Franklin, Anita Baker, Jill Scott, Al Green, Stevie Wonder, The Isleys, The Gap Band, Frankie Beverly & Maze, Chaka Khan, Mary J. Blige, Syleena Johnson, Brandy, Deborah Cox, Tamia, Musiqsoulchild, Boyz II Men, Anthony Hamilton, and R. Kelly are just a few of the true R&B singers over the last forty years. I think the current state of R&B is stagnant and without feeling. Most of the music has been turned into Popular music and classified as Pop. Usher, a true R&B artist, is classified as Pop by the industry. We are losing the genre of R&B. Something has broken it. The genre of R&B has spawned several other genres of music such as Pop and Hip Hop, true, but when you think back to the 60s, 70s and 80s, R&B was dominant, Popular, and forceful. It even played a role in Country and Rock music. Unfortunately, R&B has dramatically changed and thus affected the African-American music culture tremendously. Today, we have Rhythm Without Blues. This book examines this phenomenon. It's a movement that has causes rooted in many forces. People often ask when REAL music is coming back. Well, no one knows the answer, but there are definite cause and effect relationships currently existing in this industry. Controversial and insightful interviews are what you will find in the following chapters. Hopefully, some light will be shed, issues uncovered, and problems addressed on the fading substance of Rhythm and Blues.

Currently, R&B exists in a very basic form. The music today is very different from the R&B of forty, twenty, or even ten years ago. Something has happened. Something has stripped the greatness of R&B of the past and turned the music of today into a void form. There are a lot of great R&B artists in the music industry. However, one cannot hide the fact that the music has changed and suffered a dramatic decline in talent, substance, and meaning. I do believe R&B is transitioning back to a soulful format, but the movement is quiet and slow. R&B artists must commit to reclaiming their throne. Claim R&B! Don't give it away to Pop culture.

Over the last forty years, our culture of black music has gone from soul singers to just singers and from Rhythm and Blues to just Rhythm. We can still dance to it and sing along with the lyrics, but much of the feeling and power is gone. What happened? Has Pop

music taken over? What about Hip Hop? Should we blame the artists or the labels? Should we blame the culture? Whatever the case may be, the music has changed and much of those changes can be attributed to the major record labels' control of the music. In addition to actual record labels, I examined Popular music, Hip Hop, radio, racism, sexism, the Internet and digital impact, the consumer, the managers, the industry, the charts, and other factors to figure out why the R&B music of today has lost its blues. I will scrutinize why it is *Rhythm Without Blues!*

The dichotomy of this book represents a genre of music broken and split into parts. Dichotomy, in its very basic definition, describes something that is split into parts. We will examine what has caused this split and hear the truth directly from the artists, executives, managers, and other key players in the industry. This book is a look at R&B music and the decline in perception, feeling, passion, sales, and growth of a music genre. A genre once revered, emulated, and imitated has been broken in half and now struggles to get airplay, break onto the charts, gain platinum sales, and win major awards.

Some of the research and questions within this book examine the role that major record labels have had on the likelihood of success of Rhythm and Blues recording artists in America from 1986 to 2006. The reason I looked at just America is because there is still a positive perception of R&B in other countries around the world. It is admired and adored in places such as Europe, Japan, and South Africa. In addition to that, R&B started here in America.

The artists' success and support may determine the type of music that is put out into the marketplace. So, I examined what it takes to be successful as well as why most R&B artists are not successful, and specifically what changed the music. I asked in-depth questions and received real and direct answers. An artists' level of support from their record label is a major factor in getting exposure and becoming successful. Record label support includes marketing, promotional, financial, and organizational resources. I ask, "Could the record label be responsible for the change in R&B?" This book will examine this question throughout each chapter.

I interviewed more than thirty people for this book. The interviewees chosen were those who were the most astute and willing to reveal the untold story. The interviews were from artists, executives, managers, producers, journalists, and lawyers. They were interviewed and their perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs were explored. Artists, executives, and managers were specifically targeted for the final chap-

ters in this book to further delve into their thoughts and beliefs on *Rhythm Without Blues*. The majority of the artists, executives, and managers will remain anonymous and confidential. Many of them are still active in the industry and confidentiality was granted to them during the interview phase. The interview formats within the following chapters vary. Some of the interviews were done over the phone, some in person, and some through questionnaires. Some interviews are short and some are very long. This makes this book an invaluable learning tool. I wanted to keep the answers real and part of my research was to uncover the truth—something that often needs the veil of confidentiality. This truth may offend or hurt some feelings, but it is a truth that must be told from the perception of my interviewees. Many of the interviewees who participated in my research have more than ten years of music industry experience; their knowledge base is deep. My goal for this book is to donate a work of art, educational art, that can be used, read, dissected, and disseminated throughout the world from the United States to Japan, and read by label executives, aspiring artists, current artists, industry and trade associations for educational purposes, journalists, music departments, universities, libraries, book clubs, talk shows, men, women, children, students, and anyone else who just loves R&B.

In Chapters 2 through 10, I interview various music insiders. The main question for most of the interviews stems from the record labels' role in supporting R&B artists. I thought it was most appropriate to start with the label. They are the foundation provided to all artists they sign. As I mentioned above, for the R&B artists, the record label is essential to their livelihood. I also found it quite important to ask some of my interviewees about Hip Hop's impact on the broken genre, radio support, and the importance of the consumer. The final chapter is called *Speaking My Mind*. I saved my thoughts and opinions for last because I didn't want this book based solely on my opinion. Therefore, in Chapter 11, I speak my mind and I do it quite vigorously. I think you will enjoy this book immensely. So, sit back, read, absorb, and take notes!

# 2

## Straight from the Pros

I call this chapter “Straight from the Pros” because that’s exactly who I reached out to. I sought after professionals in their field to gather their perceptions about R&B. I wanted to interview people who are real and active in the music industry. The following interviews are from some of the most inspirational people that I have ever met. They challenged me during the interviews and I appreciated it. I interviewed Toxic, a producer for China White Productions. He is responsible for many great hit songs. His roster includes Twista, Keyshia Cole, Syleena Johnson, and many others. After his interview, you will find Mickey “MeMpHiTz” Wright. MeMpHiTz is Vice President of A&R at Jive Records, CEO of HiTz Committee Entertainment, and co-host of BET’s new music television show *The Deal*. He is a powerhouse businessman in the music industry. Mickey “MeMpHiTz” Wright received his nickname at Arista Records pushing out hits with the Youngbloodz and J-Kwon. However, it was at Jive Records where he continued his winning streak by signing R&B/Hip Hop star, T-Pain. MeMpHiTz provided insight from an executive’s mind but also as a Hip Hop and R&B advocate. Next, is a short but sweet interview from Nicci Gilbert, lead singer from the group Brownstone. Brownstone was a powerful R&B female group in the 90s. Nicci, Mimi, and Maxee were the three

original members. I asked Nicci about her views on the current state of R&B and she gave it to me unfiltered and real!

Michael “Blue” Williams’s interview follows my interview with Nicci Gilbert. Blue served many capacities and roles over the last fifteen years as he helped launch the careers of the members of the rap duo Outkast. He is an entertainment mogul and the CEO of Family Tree Entertainment. Blue started his company eleven years ago while working and rising to president of Queen Latifah’s record label The Flavor Unit. Next, I have a short interview with R. Kelly. He is best known for writing and producing his own work for the last fifteen years. However, he has been instrumental in penning hits for great artists such as Syleena Johnson, Celine Dion, Charlie Wilson, Kelly Price, Ronald Isley, and Joe, to name a few. Following the R. Kelly interview is a brief interview with Larry Khan, EVP of Jive Records and a marketing guru. The final two interviews are with French Spencer, an Atlanta based producer and Ralph De Palma, an attorney with Pryor Cashman in New York City. French Spencer has been producing music for several years and has a great ear for music. Ralph is not only a good friend of mine and legal expert but has also serves as an entertainment attorney for Syleena Johnson. You will learn so much from these interviews that by the time you reach Chapter 4, you will be a music expert. Some of the interviews are un-edited and transcribed exactly how it was stated. I didn’t want to change anything so there may be some inappropriate language, but that is the realism that you get in the industry. I didn’t want my interviewees to change themselves just for me so I let them be real.

## **RECORD LABELS, MUSIC, AND MORE...**

### **The Toxic Interview**

Syleecia: Do you think Hip Hop has affected R&B music as it relates to radio, TV, I guess industry as whole?

Toxic: No.

Syleecia: Why?

Toxic: Cause, why are looking at me like that, because usually all, like you look at music I mean, like even back in the day, how music has evolved into different things. All music evolves into different things. Ah, Doo Wop, know what I’m saying, it evolved into something, hear what I’m saying, it evolved into something, you hear what I’m saying, and it

always came from different spectrums of music. Hear what I'm saying, so Hip Hop cannot affect R&B in a negative way, because it's really all music. It's, you know what I'm saying, like know you got the music being mashed together in a certain particular way, that make it sound like something that's new. You know what I'm saying, I mean you're always going to have different genres of music that's going to sell, other genres do it a little bit different. But when saying, for instance like with two artists mixed two together, it begins about a whole other genre of music, you know what I'm saying. So it hasn't affected in a negative way, it only affects in a good way. You know what I'm saying, because it's like you know, Hip Hop and R&B mixing it together it builds certain artists. For instance like, ah Ciara is like a Hip Hop R&B artist, you know, what I'm saying. Ah Missy is like that, she mixed the two, she's that type of artist.

Syleecia: So if we look at true R&B artists, do you think it's fair to say that they, R&B and Hip Hop, artists compete? As it relates to radio, because people, you know, if you look at the big stations, they want to play more Hip Hop, because it appeals to a younger generation.

Toxic: I mean, yeah, because that's, I mean, that's just what young people want to hear, you know what I'm saying, but at the end of the day, I mean, you can't downgrade the radio stations, you know. Because that's what young people want to hear. They don't want to hear R&B, I mean, they want Hip Hop music, you know what I'm saying, and they don't necessarily want to hear R&B. Now if you're smart then if you're an R&B artist, you'll know how to really mesh your music with what's going on, and making it into Hip Hop, you know what I'm saying, something new and something that these kids want to hear. You know what I'm saying? So you have to know how to do that. I mean, you can't sit up and be blaming the industry or the radio or this, that, and the other for you not being able to conform the music and adapt to a different type of crowd.

Syleecia: Or is it, or okay, as a producer when you create R&B do you think, do you stick to the original feeling, you know, that emotion and history behind black music when creating or do you try to make what's Popular?

Toxic: I try to make something I can feel. And at the end of the day music is a competition. So you got to be able to compete with what's out there. A lot of the music that is happen-

ing today, I'm really not feeling it, but I know you'll hear that from a lot of different artists, you understand. People really are, people really love music, and know what music is really about. I don't really feel it all, but it's still creative. But at the end of the day if that's what a lot of the artists said in Hip Hop when it first started know what I'm saying, that they wasn't really feeling certain elements of what was going on in music. And if they didn't embrace it, you know what I'm saying, so it's the same now. I don't feel exactly what's going on all the way, but I know I had to adjust how to put a little bit of what I like, and a little bit of what was popular.

Syleecia: R&B records sound like Hip Hop or Pop records? Because that's what's in.

Toxic: Yeah you got to. You got to, I mean, you gotta kind of mesh with the time, you hearing what I'm saying, but at the same time you still add your element of what you feel in the music. Always gonna add what you're feelin' in music as a producer, it ain't gonna never be exactly this or exactly that. It's always gonna be about what you feel at that time, you know what I'm saying. So I mean, that's why you got like in the 70s, you got 70s music sounds like 70s music. Everybody sounds the same, you know what I'm saying, you had your few people that deviated, but you know what I'm saying, and if you're not following that then of course you're not gonna get no record sales. You're not going to sell records like you should.

Syleecia: So who's dictating the times? The culture or society?

Toxic: Ah, yeah I mean just people. You know what I'm saying? I mean, just the consumer is dictating what, hear what I'm saying, what music is all about. What they like, because at the end of the day, I mean, you got to feel it, like right now it got to be selling. At the core of what's inside an album like when you listen to an Usher album or Alicia Keys album. Yeah they going to have those R&B cuts and stuff that you like as an R&B fan, but in order to get the crowd, you hear what I'm saying, people got to have that club thing like period.

Syleecia: I just don't think every R&B artist is a club artist.

Toxic: No, they're not.

Toxic: Yeah you got some artists that are club artists, yeah, but I guarantee you right now they're records that either are going to give you, if they're not club records they're gonna give you a certain emotion. You know what I'm saying? That

you're going to be able to relate to. Hear what I'm saying, like every record ain't got to be a club record that's gonna be the number one seller, but it helps, but it needs to have that emotional feel tied to it that, you know it's going to have mass appeal.

Syleecia: And do you think it's anything to do with sexism or racism? Racism first.

Toxic: No. I think with record labels point blank, cut and dry, they want a hit.

Syleecia: They want a hit.

Toxic: They want a hit. So at the end day, all that other sh\*\* don't even matter.

Syleecia: But you must agree that the industry is sexist.

Toxic: In what way?

Syleecia: Well, a woman has to look like Ciara or Beyoncé.

Toxic: Oh yeah, I mean, I mean, the dudes gotta look a certain way too.

Syleecia: So when you take a Kelly Price or Angie Stone, they may be great, great singers, but they are not given the same resources as a Beyoncé or Ciara and they are not at the same level of success. Well, Jill Scott has a good amount of success but however she has a different type of engine behind her. A smaller boutique label, Hidden Beach.

Toxic: But at the end of the day, people, I know what you're saying, like the way you look is important for women.

Syleecia: Let's take Lil Wayne for example. Not your typical LL Cool J but very successful.

Toxic: Well, I ain't got no feelin' on that. I don't even look at the videos, but I tell you this right now.

Syleecia: But he's not attractive in my opinion, but I'm not, that's a bad example because I actually like Lil Wayne, and I think he was long overdue.

Toxic: Oh so you're saying just because how he looks don't really matter to what actually his records sales are.

Toxic: Yeah I feel you on that. But at the end of the day, it's like you look at that and you say okay...that's true, but it's still about the material.

Syleecia: All my interviewers have said, "Oh it's the material, the material." I don't think that's the case all the time. I think garbage records make it all the time.

Toxic: Garbage records to you, but that's what I'm saying. You got to put your brain in the brain of a stupid, not stupid, but of a young kid that don't care about none of that goofy ass sh\*\* that we care about like theory of music, they don't give a fu\*\* about no sh\*\*. They don't give a fu\*\* about love that's stupid sh\*\* that don't apply to them. When I was young and growing up, I didn't care about all of that sh\*\*. I just wanted to hear a record that I could go down the street and listen to the beat and the sh\*\* say what I want it to say, and it make me feel good, like remember music is a feelin' and it ain't got nothing to do with the theories of it.

Syleecia: It has a lot to do with your experience. I grew up in a music household so I'm thinking everybody should sound like Aretha Franklin and Al Green and Sam Cooke. But okay, I feel your point.

Toxic: Exactly so but at the end of the day, if music is only a feeling, so if a child or a kid or even a person in their twenties or whatever, if they want to get this feelin' that they want to get out of the music, if they want to feel, you know, they want to get some from a woman or they want to go, you know, start a fight or they want to go do this or do that or they are sad one day and they want to feel happy and rejuvenated about something that music has to speak to them, like you know whatever, they don't want to buy nothing from you just because you sound like the best singer in the world. They want something that relates to them.

Syleecia: I mean I agree with you on that.

Toxic: But I know what you are talking about, what music is supposed to sound like regardless to how we would look at it. You know what I'm saying, but you are right on some aspects of it.

Syleecia: I get the consumer; I do think the consumer plays a big part.

Toxic: Consumer is different now. If I could change all the consumers buying patterns, yeah, of course I would go and say here go some real sh\*\*, listen to this. This is what's dope, you hear what I'm saying, but that ain't what the kids feelin'. That ain't what they're feelin' right now.

Syleecia: I call it the dumbing down of our society, and it's in everything, movies and everything. They want to be online; they want things quickly. We are in a tech-driven society; they want Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace.

Toxic: Everything is simple now. So it's just more simplified. So, the music is simplified too.

Syleecia: Cause I remember I liked Jodeci when I was younger and Mary J Blige.

Toxic: But see that, if you listen back to those records now, those were good records, even Jodeci, all of that sh\*\*. Those were good records then and now.

Syleecia: So you do agree that Hip Hop has had an effect on R&B, you know how it appeals to the consumer more than R&B.

Toxic: I feel like Hip Hop has affected R&B.

Toxic: The only way it is affected is because certain R&B artists don't know how to put that sh\*\* together with Hip Hop and make it happen. Make R&B into another type of music. That's all. That's what Jodeci did; Jodeci knew how to mesh the two forms of music. Who now is doing that? Ciara, R. Kelly, give me some other names, I mean, and you know what I'm saying. If you know how to do that, then you are gonna stay with what's current and say I'm just gonna keep this sh\*\* so R&B like.

Syleecia: Then, they say you're trying to crossover, and then you're trying to be Pop.

Toxic: What if people were stuck in the Doo Wop days of music? So, forget what they are talking about, I ain't trying to change this sh\*\*. I'm trying to come up on it. In the 1970s, the music was one way now it's different. Sh\*\* I ain't gonna change this sh\*\*.

Syleecia: My sister, you know her record, "Where is the Love?," where she's got the vocalizer on it? You know what a DJ said? They told her to take that part off because they didn't buy it on her.

Toxic: Why?

Syleecia: Because they feel she is not that type of R&B artist, I guess. So, then that's what I'm saying: you try to do something different and then they say they don't buy it.

Toxic. Okay, how many DJs said that?

Syleecia: It was a few, it wasn't a lot.

Toxic: Because let me tell you why. Because whoever said that, they don't know what they're talking about it. In my opinion, because someone dares to try something different, people got something to say. Anytime you're stepping out of the box, then people want to tell you to take it off or don't do

it. Hear what I'm saying? That's why you got to be willing to take a chance and say okay let me try this sh\*\*. Syleena wants to do something different. That's when you say, okay, she's trying to mesh one type of music and then put her flavor on it. R. Kelly come and do it and it's, oh it's cool, because he's conformed so much to that, that people are used to that. What if he still would be singing...bump and grind and sh\*\* like that right now. He still sings a form of bump and grind today, R. Kelly, but what if he was just the same, his music would sell a little. We can't stick to the same thing. You got to change it up unless you want be stuck in your career.

Syleecia: So, do you think R&B is coming back, but what about the decline in sales over the last twenty years?

Toxic: It declined, it declined, because certain artists were not willing to conform. The artists that did conform, like Usher, R Kelly, the artists that conform, they are the top artists. The artists that didn't want to conform are the artists that are still not selling the records. Yeah that's just it.

Syleecia: What about the impact of illegal downloading?

Toxic: Yeah, all that sh\*\*, that sh\*\* affected music period. Hear what I'm saying? Like I'm saying it affects everybody in music. Hear what I'm saying, it affects me as a producer, you know you don't get, you don't get the budgets no more for these albums.

Syleecia: Because when I did my research on it, I looked at four areas in an organization. I looked at the top 4. Universal, Warner, EMI, and Sony; how they support artists from organizational, financial, marketing, and promotional support, and it just really came back that they just really don't support R&B artists and the decline in sales are a part of that.

Toxic: I think they don't support artists, not just R&B artists, if they don't have a smash or a hit, and it's something that they feel like they will not get money from.

Syleecia: And they're not putting money in the beginning to push the records though so how do they know if it will be a hit? How can you get a smash hit if you don't want to put the money behind R&B?

Toxic: They want to hear about you grinding, going into the studio, and coming out with that banger, and they say oh, this sh\*\* right here is without a doubt a hit. That's when it will get one thousand or five hundred thousand spins, now all of it is R&B and the nature of the business. Point blank. They don't want to put money up first, they want to see this

blow first and then if it's a hit, then your A&Rs and your label gonna get behind it and you. They will say, oh we knew this was a hit!

Syleecia: They're crazy! They need to be like Clive Davis looking for talent first and believing in the artists.

Toxic: And finding a record saying I'm going to put my effort behind this record. Know what I'm saying, they ain't saying that though. They want to hear that record, first. Like you'll still have Clive Davis put some money behind a record if he believes in it.

Syleecia: Yea, Jazmine Sullivan.

Toxic: Yeah, and what's the other chick?

Syleecia: Fantasia.

Toxic: No.

Syleecia: Jennifer Hudson?

Toxic: No. The other chick.

Syleecia: Alicia Keys.

Toxic: No.

Syleecia: Jordan Sparks.

Toxic: See they put money behind her.

Syleecia: Jordan?

Toxic: See what I'm saying, they put money behind her.

Syleecia: She was American Idol.

Toxic: Yes, but her records, them records popped off like that. You see what I'm saying. They popped off.

Syleecia: Well, thank you for your insight. I guess on a lot of this stuff we must agree to disagree, but the challenge is still ahead of us.

Toxic: True and you're welcome.

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