



## **India.Arie** **Blurbs**

A gentle genius lives in the mind, voice and hands of this woman.  
**Stevie Wonder**

One of the most determinedly virtuous songwriters in R&B or pop, India.Arie strives to make faith, goodness and positive thinking seductive.  
**The New York Times**

Arie provides a multicultural dialogue about love and human politics.  
**Billboard**

Arie has devised a fresh musical language appropriate to her concerns, a lighter form of acoustic-guitar-based R&B.  
**The Independent**

India.Arie is one of those rare talents who combines a humble humanitarianism with musical magnificence.  
**New Musical Express**



## India.Arie discusses next new album with Israeli singer Idan Raichel

By Mesfin Fekadu (AP) MAR 3, 2011

LOS ANGELES (AP) — On India.Arie's last album, she blended a world music sound with her signature style of soul. She's planning to take things to the next level on an upcoming CD with Israeli singer Idan Raichel.

"I always go different (and) I went even farther," India.Arie said in a recent interview.

The album, "Open Door," will be released this summer. It will feature songs in Hebrew and English, though India.Arie doesn't know Hebrew, explaining that Raichel "teaches me the translation."

While vacationing in Israel, the 34-year-old singer asked locals who the most influential political singer-songwriter was in town.

"Everybody said, 'Idan Raichel, Idan Raichel — same name all the time,'" she recalled. "So I just went to his little apartment, I heard his music and was like, 'That's my music!'"

Raichel, the dreadlocked composer who uniquely blends Israeli, Ethiopian, Yemenite and Latin sounds, is mainly known for his role in the group The Idan Raichel Project. The Project has some 90 revolving members from Sudan, Uruguay, Colombia and Rwanda. They sing primarily in Hebrew, Spanish, Arabic and Swahili, and bandmates range in age from 16 to people in their 80s. The Project burst onto the Israeli scene in 2002 and has released three successful albums.

India.Arie and Raichel, 33, can be seen in a YouTube video for their song, "Gift of Acceptance." The two performed the tune in December at the Nobel Peace concert in honor of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo in Oslo, Norway. They also held special concerts in Los Angeles and Atlanta to promote the upcoming CD.

"People were crying and (there was) a lot of good feedback," said India.Arie, who is also planning an international tour with Raichel.

"Open Door" will be the soul singer's fifth CD. Her first three albums were multiplatinum, platinum and gold successes. But 2009's "Testimony: Vol. 2, Love & Politics" didn't match her previous efforts, only selling 320,000 units, according to Nielsen SoundScan.

Though the disc may — or may not — be a hit for the multiple Grammy winner, India.Arie says she's not concerned with album sales, thanks to the encouraging support from family, friends and fans.

"My family especially, they're like, 'Oh my god India, why are you doing this? We don't know who's going to buy it,'" she recalled.

"My mom cries every time she hears the songs," she continued. "...They kept saying stuff like, 'This is you, but different. It's almost like you can do anything, but it's still you.'"



## How India.Arie got her groove back

*With 'musical soulmate' Idan Raichel, the soul maven opens a new door*

by Rodney Carmichael



India.Arie was absolutely giddy, like a schoolgirl with a secret crush, as she stepped on stage for her big reveal two weeks ago. She'd kept her new music under wraps for nearly six months, only divulging the extent of her ongoing collaboration with Israeli pop star Idan Raichel in a *Creative Loafing* [interview](#) two months prior.

The two of them had already appeared on stages together — with [Arie singing Raichel's "Mey Nahar"](#) ("River Waters") in Hebrew, accompanied by Raichel on piano — at New York's Museum of Jewish Heritage last November, and at a Kennedy Center concert in Washington, D.C., for Martin Luther King Day, with President Obama in attendance.

But Aug. 7 was the trump card, and a new beginning of sorts for Arie, as she prepared to present an album's worth of material written and composed with her self-professed "musical soulmate," whom she'd crossed cultural boundaries to meet. While walking through an Open Door — the title of both the listening performance and the eventual album to be released next spring — she was just as anxious to close one on an industry she no longer could allow to compromise her message and brand of acoustic soul.

"I never said anything I didn't want to say," Arie told a packed 7 Stages audience of family, friends and Twitter-following fans who'd inadvertently caused the website of her indie start-up label, SoulBird, to

crash after she tweeted about a limited amount of tickets to the private event. "But *I haven't* said things that I *do* want to say."

When Arie charged out of the gate 10 years ago, proclaiming that she was "not the average girl in the video," it was a bold, self-affirming statement in an era where video hos were a hot commodity in black pop. While objectifying her body was out of the question, Arie says she did choose, on some songs, to sacrifice the acoustic sound that had garnered her such a strong local following at Yin



Yang Cafe in the late '90s for a style of production that her label felt would make her more palatable to urban radio.

And it paid off. Spearheaded by that first single, "Video," her 2001 Motown debut, *Acoustic Soul*, was eventually certified double platinum.

But by the time she met Raichel, on a whim, during a 2008 vacation to Israel almost three Grammy awards and three albums later, Arie was nearing a point of desperation. The more she'd compromised for the sake of a radio single here or there, the more she saw a decline in album sales — which, though it probably had more to do with the insufferable state of the industry, still made her question the point of it all.

"I think that's what I started to hate about the music industry," said the [2010 Georgia Music Hall of Fame inductee](#), offering testimony between performing spiritual salvos with such cosmic titles as "The One," "Brother Sister," and "You Are a Star." "I was trying to push myself on people who might not like me [anyway]."

That certainly wasn't the case at 7 Stages, where a mixed bag of supporters, some of whom had driven or flown from as far as Alabama, North Carolina and British Columbia, gushed tears of praise during the talk-back session for Arie's ability to speak their language. "You gave me back my song, and I didn't even know I'd lost it," said one fan after hearing Raichel and Arie's new work. "It was water to my soul. Thank you for being frustrated enough to get to this point."

**Arie's latest epiphany** isn't a change in course as much as it is one of many reminders she's received on her path of evolution. Just as she crafted a personal mantra ("to spread love, healing, peace and joy through words and music") to remind her of her purpose after losing out on seven Grammy nods in 2002, her recent breakthrough came following an ego-bruising 2009 tour and subsequent prayer and writing sabbaticals she took to reconnect with her center.

"I've had to let go of certain people, worn out ideas about myself, and MOST OF ALL, I've had to let go of MY image of ME," she wrote in a [post on her website](#), announcing the details of the invitation-only show a few weeks ago.

It felt like a homecoming as Arie was joined on stage by many of the pivotal friends and figures she launched her indie career with so many years ago, including longtime songwriting homie (and SoulBird signee) Anthony David, who showed up to sing background after she called on him the night before; bassist Khari Simmons, who came up with Arie in Atlanta's defunct Groovement artist collective and backed her on her first major tour, opening for Sade in '01; Anasa Troutman, close friend and former co-founder of Groovement and corresponding indie label Earthseed; as well as twangy-guitarist Blue Miller,

who recorded with Arie on *Acoustic Soul*; and Hilda Willis, her long-time artistic coach and behind-the-scenes creative director.

Being the first breakout artist of the altruistic Groovement/Earthseed collective, Arie eventually exited to sign her major label deal with Motown in 2000. "We weren't really making money, and I wanted to make money," she reflected in a June *CL* interview. "It's been 10 years since I signed that deal. In hindsight, I threw away a lot of the things that I could've kept. ... I wish that there were just certain friendships that I could've held on to, and that I could've stayed in contact with certain people."

As Arie twirled and danced for the intimate 7 Stages' crowd in a free-flowing, white skirt and tank top, showing off moves that looked more improvised than choreographed (contrary to the program crediting choreography to Jai McClendon-Jones), her career seemed to have come full circle. While she breezed through songs like the reggae-tinged and surprisingly radio-friendly "Get Up" ("Get up/This is not the time to give up"), it became obvious that Arie still has those intangibles that have kept her commercially viable for a decade: the rich alto she dips, like a ladle, into those smoky, soul-stirring registers; the ability to convey the deepest truths in the simplest terms; and that unexplainable inner glow.

Still, some of her staunchest supporters — including her mom/stylist, who goes by her last name, Simpson, and her older brother, J'On — weren't entirely sold, at least before the show, on her renewed sense of direction. That was based on the incomplete tracks they'd heard. Worried that an album full of slow, brooding, piano-heavy songs might not pop, her brother had initially encouraged her to "do a song with [rapper] Rick Ross" — a pairing so odd even the audience gasped at the mention of his name.

While she's had some wildly diverse duet partners in her career — from Akon ("I Am Not My Hair") to John Cougar Mellencamp ("Peaceful World") to her idol Stevie Wonder ("A Time to Love") — none seem as inconceivable as her pairing with Raichel. Yet somehow, despite being worlds apart, they fit. Like the contrast of his blonde, matted dreads to her jet-black, cascading braids, Raichel's classical, melodic piano playing combines with Arie's folk and gospel-inspired vocals to strike a tender, emotional chord, especially when paired with trance-inducing, tribal drums (superbly played by Kinah Boto that night).

But could there be something more to them than that?

"She did try to hit on me," Raichel said in his thick Jewish accent, peeking over the piano with a blushing smirk. To which Arie pounced back, "Yeah, 'cause he's a superstar in Israel, and a sex symbol — which I don't get, but whatever."

Whether or not their flirtation is simply for show, their creative partnership seems to have sparked some of the best, and frankest, love songs of Arie's career, including "He Is the Shit" and the smoldering "Sixth Avenue," on which she guides listeners through a tour of historic NYC attractions before crooning on the hook, "My favorite place in the Empire State/is in bed with you."

But, ultimately, they hope their mutual admiration can set an example abroad. "You and I know how brave you are to even perform with an Israeli musician in these days," Raichel told Arie as they spoke of their desire to tour the world with a culturally diverse group of musicians from the war-torn Middle East.

After addressing the need to elevate human consciousness by cutting through cultural barriers in the song "Gift of Acceptance," Arie stressed the point she hopes their collaboration will make: "Tolerance is different than acceptance."

As guilty as Arie may be of sounding hippie-dippie at times, she hasn't totally forsaken the business of music. The very purpose of the show was to corral a concentration of her fan base together to get their reaction to the new music, which could go a long way when the time comes to market and promote *Open Door*. That fact was not lost on her new manager, industry vet Ron Gillyard (who seemed encouraged, if a little bewildered, at the power of her Twitter following), or BET's programming guru Stephen Hill, who was also present.

Finally, Arie turned to her mother — a former Motown singer who opened for the likes of Stevie Wonder and Al Green back in the day — to ask her opinion, after having had the opportunity to hear Arie and Raichel's musical creation performed live.

"Now I hear your story and I see your story," Simpson said. "I'm listening."

But the critical moment came as the two-hour performance and hour-long talk-back drew to a close. With fans fully forewarned that anyone caught recording or photographing the performance would get the boot, an audience member wanted to know, now that it was over, if he still had to keep it a secret.

"Can we tweet about it?" he asked.

Arie gleamed back at him with a coy smile and tucked her chin as if she was flattered, before responding with a squeak:

*"Please!"*

## SOUL TRACKS

With an earthy, organic demeanor, a honey-coated alto and an insistence on bringing a message with her music, India Arie Simpson took the scene by storm with her 2001 debut, *Acoustic Soul*. Over the years, thanks to self-esteem-building songs like "Video," "Little Things" and "I Am Not My Hair," the Denver, CO native became known, even celebrated, for her introspection and honesty. While some of her peers are content to create music only from behind carefully constructed facades, Ms. Arie never hesitates to delve into her personal heartaches, expose them to the masses and evolve beyond them in the process. Her fourth CD, a follow-up to 2006's *Testimony: Vol. 1, Life & Relationship*, continues to filter life lessons through the healing power of song, but with more texture and perspective.

Aside from the rich tapestry she weaves with her words, one of the gifts that sets India Arie apart is her ability to turn lofty ideals into relatable experiences: "Ghetto" could've turned into a predictable diatribe against the struggle of rich vs. poor, but it actually describes the world as a smaller place than we realize and that many conditions are universal: "To be hungry in L.A., is like starving in Bombay. Homeless in Morocco, is a shelter in Chicago." "He Heals Me" finds her awash in the cleansing feeling that unconditional love brings, describing a gentle soul who understands her shortcomings and embraces her flaws: "And even when I'm wrong, he's still kind....he chooses his words wisely when he tells me I'm not right." She is also unequalled in adding depth and dimension to everyday occurrences. The upbeat "Yellow," featuring the velvety tones of Terrell Carter (from the Tyler Perry plays), equates the color spectrum to the ups and downs in a relationship: "There are times you make me see red, and then you shine your white. I get all pink inside....together me and you are purple, because we are so royal." Equally joyful is her ditty of a duet with Musiq Soulchild, "Chocolate High," comparing a love affair with the delectable richness of....well, that luscious dessert: "I crave you, I want you, every cell in my body needs you. Tasty like Hershey's and Nestle, you're rich like Godiva, boy you're just so sexy."

Whereas Jill Scott trounced her detractors with "Hate On Me," Ms. Arie lists a litany of negatives that she's endured over the years and remains firm against them all with resolve, The Word and a fiesty cameo by MC Lyte in "Psalms 23": "I've seen, money come between my best friend and me....I've been, through a couple of litigations: I've been, through character assassinations." Even with her elevated mindset, she's still vulnerable to loving the wrong man, and instead of slashing his tires or cursing him out, she succumbs to her passion, but still bids him adieu in the bittersweet "Long Goodbye."

There are some clunky moments ("Therapy" and the soon-tedious trio of "Grains" interludes) scattered between the gems ("Rivers Rise," the breezy "A Beautiful Day" and her exquisitely rendered remake of Sade's classic, "Pearls"), but it doesn't negate the fact that *Vol. 2....* is Ms. Arie's most emotional, illustrious and spiritually centered release yet. Because of her refusal to rest on her artistic laurels and the continuing transcendence of her lyrical and vocal range, *Testimony: Vol. 2...* is qualified as an early must-have CD for 2009.

*By Melody Charles*

# The New York Times

By Jon Pareles

## INDIA.ARIE "Testimony: Vol. 2, Love & Politics" (Soulbird Music/Universal Republic)

Love is both bliss and panacea, while politics is a test of fortitude, on India.Arie's fourth studio album, "Testimony: Vol. 2, Love & Politics." One of the most determinedly virtuous songwriters in R&B or pop, India.Arie strives to make faith, goodness and positive thinking seductive, and on this album, working as her own co-producer (with Dru Castro), she's endearing even when she's preachy. "Testimony: Vol. 1: Love & Relationship," released in 2006, delved into the pain of a breakup, and in "Psalms 23" she hints at more strife: "I've been through a couple of litigations/through character assassination." But on most of "Vol. 2" her equanimity has been restored. Her lover in the lilting "Chocolate High" (as portrayed by her duet partner and co-writer Musiq Soulchild) is an addictive treat. Elsewhere her man is an ever-understanding listener in the celebratory "Therapy" and the ballad "He Heals Me." As usual most of the songs feature India.Arie's acoustic guitar and her forthright but still girlish voice, with its Stevie Wonder phrasing. Acoustic syncopation accompanies her global view of poverty and survival in the flamenco-tinged "Ghetto" and in "Pearls," which features a singer from the Ivory Coast, Dobet Gnahore. But the music doesn't stay folksy. "Long Goodbye," about a last tryst, grows into a power ballad akin to Prince's "Purple Rain." In "Better Way," India.Arie protests the response to Hurricane Katrina, the war in Iraq and prematurely sexualized children, matching bluesy vocals to Keb Mo's electric guitar.

# allmusic

By John Duffy

## Acoustic Soul: India.Arie

As one of the most promising neo-soul artists yet to emerge in the past few years, India.Arie casts her lot with the best artists of her label's storied history, playing deeply introspective songs laced with glistening acoustic guitar, churchy organ, and smooth, supple beats. When she name-checks those artists no longer with us that she claims as influences (Ma Rainey, Miles Davis, Karen Carpenter, Charley Patton, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Donny Hathaway, etc.) in three separate interludes, you have no doubt she is looking back as well as forward, even going so far as to invoke Sam Cooke's "A Change Is Gonna Come." But Acoustic Soul is at its best when the arrangements are deliberately modern. And despite the uniqueness of being a guitar-based R&B album, it is Arie's thick, sandy voice that shares star billing with her exceptional lyrics. Betraying youthful vulnerability while at the same time projecting strength, confidence, and uncanny insight for a 25-year-old singer/songwriter, Arie wraps herself effortlessly around the deep, funky sensuality of "Brown Skin," and stands tall in defiance of pop-fashion expectations on the irresistibly catchy "Video." The uplifting "Faith, Courage, Wisdom" rides along on a euphoric chorus, and the plainly autobiographical "Back to the Middle" recounts an emotional and spiritual coming of age. Without the many concrete references to the great R&B music of the past, Acoustic Soul would be a purely modern gem, but as Arie is determined to pay her debts up front, it's much more, and that is admirable.



NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS

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## India.Arie : Acoustic Soul

*Organic soul brilliance from the Stevie Wonder-endorsed Arie*

Diana Evans

It is enough that Stevie Wonder has called her a genius. Hailing from Denver, USA, India.Arie is one of those rare talents who combines a humble humanitarianism with musical magnificence (much like Stevie himself, whom, incidentally, India tributes at the end of the LP).

At a time when R&B seems divided into two large camps - the synthesized, albeit accomplished, commercialism of the likes of Destiny's Child, Sisqo and Craig David et al; and that sprawling mass of experimentation and urban cool known as Nu Classic Soul that, unreasonably, umbrellas everyone from D'Angelo to Jazzyfatnastees - India's organic combo of acoustic symphonics, naked drums, the frankness of hip hop, and a voice borne of soul in its purest, most spiritual sense, stands out as a kind of sweet liberation.

'Acoustic Soul' delivers itself like a prayer. Lyrically, it makes a religion of blackness. A shrine to black femininity. To roundness and loveliness regardless of material worth in the audacious opener, 'Video'; to brilliance and honesty in the guitar-wrapped 'Back to the Middle'; to love and bravery in the elegant 'Ready For Love'.

Many other crusaders come to mind: Tracy Chapman, Meshell Ndegeocello, Roberta Flack - women with the blues tangled up in their hearts, who bind stoicism with sensuality, who create spaces, and will always, always do their own thing - no compromise. 'Acoustic Soul' is a formidable and deeply artistic debut.