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The private Diva

In a rare interview, Sade talks to *Prime Time* of music, love and her life philosophy: Age equals beauty

BY ELIO IANNACCI

Sade is the last of a special breed of pop star. At a time when most singers are expected to tweet about their every mood or to stage a scandal every time a new album drops, 51-year-old Helen Folasade Adu remains a quiet anomaly. Although the reclusive Nigerian-born, British-raised singer has recorded six studio albums over the course of her 26-year career, she's a pop music sphinx compared to contemporaries like Madonna. Case in point? Sade seldom does interviews, rarely updates her website, never blogs or tweets and steers clear of collaborating with any famous hit makers, fashion designers or trendy Hollywood stylists.

Yet being an understated performer in an industry filled with artists who constantly indulge in overstatement (read: Lady Gaga) continues to work for Sade. For example, her latest album, *Soldier of Love*—which took nearly 10 years to produce—has sold over 2.5 million sales worldwide sans a gruelling publicity campaign, tabloid headline or talk-show circuit tour.

The mystery that surrounds her is something Sade is exceedingly proud of. While on the phone from L.A., she insists that keeping her private life away from the public is “not a marketing strategy at all.”

Although “commerce is required” in the music business, she firmly believes that her music is for sale but not her persona. “Keeping my cards so close to my chest has been a necessary choice,” she confides. “It’s not easy to be a front person and it’s hard to deliver what could be an expectation that you’re not completely, concretely aware of. Being private allows me to carry on being who I am and not to fall prey to the machine.”

Soldier of Love

It's a sentiment further amplified on the CD sleeve of *Soldier of Love*, which she told *The New York Times* she didn't even want to appear on. Her concession was a photo where her front profile is not visible and her body is turned towards the Zapotec archaeological ruins in the Monte Albán region of Oaxaca in Mexico. Various Sade fan-site message boards have deduced that the beautiful image of a decaying landscape framing her body is a symbol of Sade's life philosophy: Age equals beauty. “Growth means strength to me,” she says. “Only time has allowed me to have no regrets whatsoever.”

And who better to represent this attitude than Sade, whose lack of wrinkles suggest she has spent the last 10 years sitting in a vat of Crème de la Mer? Physically she's fitter than ever and one glimpse of her latest video will have most people thinking she's lived the last 10 years of her life stress-free. However, nothing is further from the truth. During her decade-long departure from the spotlight, Sade had her hands full. Aside from raising her now-13-year-old

daughter, Ila, in rural Gloucestershire, in southwest England, she had to deal with the divorce from her husband of six years, Spanish film director Carlos Pliego. Afterwards she met and ended a relationship with a Jamaican musician—Ila's father, whom Sade refuses to talk about—and started a long-term relationship with Ian Watts, a former firefighter and officer of the Royal Navy. “All of the mistakes I've made in life—including my relationships—make me a better person,” she says of her past partners. “Because of them, I'm now able to know what matters most.”

Healing songs

But while away from the public eye, she did not really stop writing songs altogether. One of *Soldier of Love*'s most personal tracks—ironically titled “Long Hard Road”—was in a drafting phase that ended up taking seven years to finish. The long, drawn-out process to finish the disc is something Sade admits to having no control over.

“Once I start writing and let the feelings flow, they dictate all of the action on their own time. I can't rush them,” she explains. “I do feel like an emotional editor in some ways. Part of the problem is that I don't want people to know too much about me, so writing is a constant conflict.”

So what does help spur her on? The knowledge that her songs may have medicinal qualities. “My mother was a nurse and my grandmother was an herbalist [who] used to make potions and soaps [to] make people feel better. I feel like I'm the best

person to administer the best possible healing as well, since people often say that my music has helped them through moments of trouble. I believe that need to heal is intrinsic.”



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Sade's signature look is tasteful and timeless.

MY MENTORS

Bryan Ferry

At 64, Bryan Ferry does not believe in acting his age or slowing down. Aside from his two recently-released, chart-climbing dance tracks with London electro musicians Groove Armada and DJ Hell, the British popster has been busy planning two big projects slated to unfold this year. He's putting the finishing touches on his 13th solo disc as well as planning a reunion with his legendary band, Roxy Music (who are booked to perform onstage in London on July 17). Here, Ferry tells *Prime Time* about the two people who influenced him the most during his life.

Aunt Enid

My favourite aunt was Aunt Enid. Her husband was in the Royal Air Force and so she knew American GIs who turned her on to American records. She would play me beautiful works of art—songs by Billy Eckstine, Billie Holiday and The Ink

Spots—I still have those 78s today. Hearing that kind of music when I was so young sparked something in me and later turned me on to Americana—Marilyn Monroe, Elvis and Liz Taylor—the whole idea of glamour and sex. Her good taste had an impact on mine.

Richard Hamilton, teacher

My whole work ethic was shaped by [pop artist] Richard Hamilton. I studied under him at [University of Newcastle Upon Tyne, in northeast England] for a few years. He was a workaholic and obsessed with his art, so I absorbed a lot from him. Maybe the obsession part was always there with me, but it was certainly reinforced [in me] as a teenager seeing him at close range. He was a good teacher and seeing him prepare works for the Guggenheim was a thing of beauty. There is still a lot to be said for the early years of anyone's career when they are discovering themselves. He influenced all the design work I've done on Roxy Music.

Bryan Ferry credits his favourite aunt and a teacher for his taste in music and art.

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Sade résumé

1984: After switching careers as a model, fashion designer and one-time stylist for British band Spandau Ballet, 25-year-old Sade signs on with CBS/Epic Records. Her debut disc, *Diamond Life*, blends new wave, jazz and pop. Her signature image—hoop earrings, red lipstick, black turtle-neck and slicked-back ponytail 'do—is born.

1985: The first single off *Diamond Life*—“Your Love Is King”—hits top 10 on the *Billboard* charts. The album's second and third singles—“Smooth Operator” and “Hang on to Your Love”—follows suit, earning the disc a BRIT Award by year-end.

1986: A second album named *Promise* is released, igniting two hits—“Sweetest Taboo” and “Never as Good as the First Time.” Months later, *Time* magazine features Sade on the cover and crowns the Anglo-Nigerian as “The Queen of Cool.”

1987: Sade wins Best New Artist at the Grammys. Her now-signature look becomes the street style staple of London and New York.

1988: The most upbeat album of Sade's career—*Stronger than Pride*—is released and includes flamenco-tinged hit “Paradise” and rhythmic chart climber “Nothing Can Come Between Us.”

1992: *Love Deluxe* is released with its epic 7-minute, 20-second hit, “Ordinary Love.” The video of the track, directed by Sophie Muller, famous for previously working with Annie Lennox, casts Sade as a modern-day version of the Danish fairy-tale character Little Mermaid.

1994: Sade wins Best R&B Performance by a Duo or Group at the Grammys for the hit “No Ordinary Love.” The cover art for the disc, which features a stunning naked photo of Sade taken by fashion snapper Albert Watson is considered to be one of the most artful album sleeves in music history.

1996: Sade's daughter, Ila, is born.

2000: The folk-roots-inspired disc, *Lovers Rock* is released, followed by a tour and live album.

2002: Sade wins Favorite Adult Contemporary Artist of the year at the American Music Awards, and the group nabs Best Pop Vocal Album at the Grammys for *Lovers Rock*.

2010: Sade's sixth studio album, *Soldier of Love*, tops the *Billboard* 200 on the first week of its release and features her daughter on back-up vocals in track B.

