

MUSIC

# Slowburn soul

*Soul's new sweetheart Lulu James is writing moody tunes laced with hope, as Ian McCabe hears*

**A**ccording to South Shields-born singer, Lulu James the North East is imbued with soul music. "It might not take the form of a 'soul scene'," says the 22-year-old. "But whether it's indie, folk, dance or whatever, the people who are in those scenes deliver passion in what they do. For me, that is soul."

The North East music might not be the first place you'd look for soul, but that hasn't deterred the refreshingly unique Lulu, who burst onto the scenes last April with her debut EP *Rope Mirage*.

Her 'little calling card' to the world has since attracted the attention of a continually growing fan base, including BBC Radio DJs Zane Lowe and Annie Mac. And she has signed to London's Black Butter record label alongside acts such as Kidnap Kid and Rudimental. Her live shows have also become a talking point across the country, in part due to her energy and amazing costumes, often including a black singlet and white veil combo.

Born in Tanzania, Lulu moved to England when she was six-years-old and has been immersed in music since before she could remember. She grew up singing in her grandmother's choir and idolised the likes of India Arie and Whitney Houston, before falling in love with electronic music, which influences her sound to this day.

Describing her lyrics as 'dark, moody and laced with hope,' Lulu dubs her sound, '21st Century soul.'

"It references the electronic edge to what I do," she explains. "If I was born in the 1940s, no doubt I would have been in a jazz or a blues band. I make music for my time - I want it to sound of the moment but with strong songs and soul."

Despite admiration for her voice

from a young age, it took time before she was convinced by her talents. "I used to get up and sing at friends' parties and stuff, and everyone would say I had a good voice," she says. "I didn't believe them, so I started going to open mic nights at places like Crabshack in Shields and The Jazz Cafe. The response was really positive so I was inspired to push on."

Enrolment at Generator's popular Urban Music Training Vox programme united Lulu with her writing partner, producer Domzilla and the pair instantly hit it off.

She says: "Dom is very talented and open to ideas, we work really well together and Generator does some great work in the region. The music scene here benefits massively from what they do."

She adds: "I got some great advice from them, so there's help out there if you want to go and find it." Lulu and Domzilla are currently working on her debut LP, splitting their time between Blast and Cluny studios in Newcastle, with hope of a release next year.

"I've been in the studio on and off since July and have written a load of material from which the album will be pulled together," explains Lulu. "The problem I have at the moment is I've got too many songs and I'm finding it hard to ditch some."

In the meantime, Lulu has just released the new double single, *Be Safe* and *Stuck* featuring Mao, which can be downloaded exclusively via iTunes.

"It costs the same as an espresso at Starbucks," laughs Lulu. "The difference is, if you spend the £1.79 on my single I promise I'll pay the tax."

*Be Safe/Stuck* is now released on Black Butter Records and is available to download on iTunes, [www.lulujames.com](http://www.lulujames.com)





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