

The Sade rumor began around this time last year.

No one would confirm it, but everyone heard from a friend who heard from a friend who heard from a music industry representative that the long-reclusive singer and her band were in the studio again, making an album sure to offer more of the sensually sultry songs the world had grown to love.

For a time, few would admit that Sade had indeed been cloistered in Peter Gabriel's Real World Studios, brewing musical magic. But the news was building. Gossip Web sites heralded a new album. False press releases appeared. Industry representatives said nothing. Then in early winter, Helen Folasade Adu updated her Web site, announcing a February 2010 album.

Lucky us, the rumor was true.

Some 10 years in the making, *Soldier of Love* finally arrived. And why did it take Sade nearly a decade to bring us something new?

Simple. She had to live.

"I've had my ups and downs in the years between these albums," says the singer, whose husky, just-woke-up alto is deeper than you might think and clipped with the most British of accents. "That's partly why I'm able to write songs that people in some way can hear. I express feelings, real feelings. If I were forever in the music machine or on the road, doing TV and in that sort of commercial world, I don't believe I would be able to step back and write the songs that I did in the way that I do."

"HELLO! HELLO! IT'S SADE ON THE LINE."

She's late for the interview. It was supposed to happen a few hours ago, but now it's 11 p.m. in the United Kingdom. 11:01. 11:05. 11:10. Finally, she calls. Well, an assistant calls. Then Sade comes to the phone. She apologizes for the late hour.

"I'm so dozy and tired," she explains. "I've been running around doing all kinds of things."

Understandable. She's very busy promoting this album with everyone including David Letterman and the ladies of *The View*. She's also walking a rigid tightrope between honestly selling this music and prostituting her privacy.

Though *Soldier of Love* topped Amazon's pre-sales list, Sade is earnest about the audience response. The album was quite the undertaking, she says. It marks the first time since the *Lovers Rock* tour ended in 2001 that she, bassist Paul Denham, guitarist and sax player Stuart Matthewman and keyboardist Andrew Hale reunited. Hale did not respond to EBONY's requests for an interview, but via a press release said: "The big question for all of us at the beginning was, did we still want to do this and could we still get along as friends?"

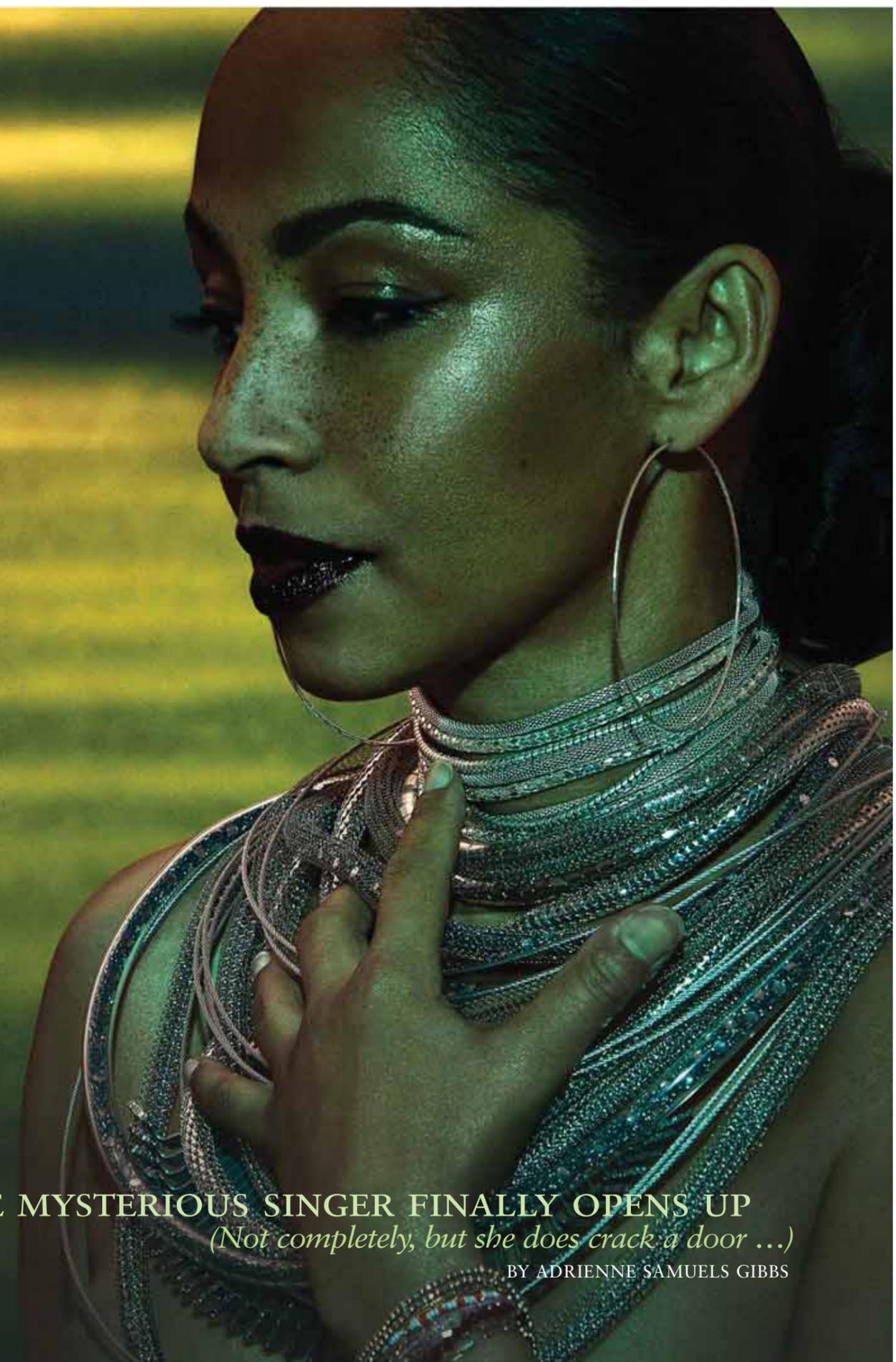
Clearly, they found a way. They call this album their most ambitious to date. It incorporates a variety of sounds with songs such as "Babyfather," which invokes Jamaican rhythms, the hip-hop beats of

the complete insider's guide to

# sade

THE MYSTERIOUS SINGER FINALLY OPENS UP  
(Not completely, but she does crack a door ...)

BY ADRIENNE SAMUELS GIBBS



“Soldier of Love” and the ambitiously arranged bigness of “The Moon and the Sky.”

It’s difficult for Sade to specifically explain how this music came to be. When pressed, she says that each of her six studio albums is an outpouring of personal experiences and that she has to “live life” in between each music session. Does she care to be more specific?

No.

“NOW THAT I HAVE A CHILD, it’s impossible to completely shut off from the realities of THE WORLD.”



Well, maybe.

“It’s not a conscious thing. I suppose I don’t try to please people. I try to be true to my heart.”

But where does the music *come* from?

“I would like to sing songs the best I can and make the song as beautiful as I can. But then there’s the [question of], ‘What does that mean?’ People have to know what I mean, who I am, where I live. But people have secrets from their neighbors. When you get on a bus, you don’t want to tell your life story to a stranger.”

It’s often cool to be a celebrity who says nothing. But as is the case with Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, sometimes that quiet gives the public a reason to make stuff up. In Sade’s case, the rumors have come fast and furiously over the years. Common sentiment and rumor hold that she was burned decades ago by allegations of depression, obsession and even drug use. Some allege she was busted for heroin possession while vacationing in the Caribbean. Other unproven rumors hold that her alleged depression stems from relationships with a series of mystery men, about whom her albums seem to be odes or sensual chastisements. Sade’s latest Gentleman X must be, the public surmises, the reason for her hiatus, after which she’ll hit us with a new sound that somehow remains sonically haunting, beautifully hopeful. Longing. Sexual. Mentally tactile. And, some might say, tormented.

Sade thinks all of that is rather dramatic. She’s not in love with the idea of love, but she practices the art of love. She married and divorced Spanish filmmaker Carlos Pliego. Her daughter is the product of a past relationship. And today’s Gentleman X has a name: Ian Watts. He’s a “great” partner, good-looking, smart, a father to his own 18-year-old son Jack, a father figure to Sade’s daughter, and he’s pretty handy, given that he actually chops wood at her country estate. It’s a life arrangement that suits Ila, Sade’s “very young” 13-year-old daughter with Jamaican producer Bob Morgan. They live together in an environment where Ila can still be a kid who crushes on Edward Cullen, the fictional hunk hero of the vampire series *Twilight*.

Ila, who sings backup on the song “Babyfather,” is the dominant reason why Sade disappeared from the limelight. Like many new moms, she chose to stay home with her new-

born. Once Ila was old enough, Sade re-entered the studio.

“Making an album, for me, is a bit like going to the moon,” she explains. “Now that I have a child, it’s impossible to completely shut off from the realities of the world. I waited until the right time [when] my family could let me go.”

And given that Ila sings on this album, is the teen prepped to become the next generation’s soulstress?

“Parents try to fulfill their aspirations through their children,” Sade says before interrupting herself and asking if she sounds too preachy. “When you give them a reign to be who they want to be, it’s so much easier for them to be whomever they want to be. My mom was like that. She was very free with us. I like the idea of children being children as long as they can.”

While recording, did it hurt to be sequestered from Ila, Jack and Ian?

“They encouraged me to do it. I’ve their full support, but it wasn’t easy being away from them.”

Sade is striking in her unaffected demeanor and mellow temperament. She doesn’t wax poetic about the trappings of celebrity. If she did sit on the beaches of Saint Tropez or eat crab on the balcony of a private Jamaican villa, she doesn’t talk about it today. Instead, she discusses holey socks, being domestic, cooking dinner, the meat (often grass-cutter rodent) cooked in her favorite Nigerian dish of *egusi* stew, making sure her daughter is the center and has a center, and, of all things, yanking potatoes out of the ground.

“In many ways it’s an everyday life,” she adds.

The image of a ponytailed, rouge-lipped, slender, British-Nigerian super songstress picking her own potatoes while wearing holey socks in the backyard of her rural Gloucestershire home is not sexy at all. But that’s what home life is.

“I live in the countryside now; I’ve learned some survival skills. I can dig potatoes,” she jokes.

Friend and sought-after dancer Fatima Robinson co-signs on the non-diva nature of this diva.

“She really is sort of everyday, but there is this special kind of magic she has when she walks into the room,” says Robinson, who choreographed the “Soldier of Love” video. “The beauty of it is



She proved it, too. When the video for title song “Soldier of Love” hit cable TV in late January, fans once again took to the blogs to proffer their thoughts.

Wrote one: “I haven’t seen a video without booty shaking and nudity in a minute. You go, girl.”

Sade’s response? A hearty chuckle.

“I’m flesh and blood like the rest,” she says. “I think it’s good to remain true to the spirit of the song. [To be half naked] would be a distraction. I’m exposing enough of myself in a musical sense. I don’t need to share anymore.”

Fans, music industry executives and other entertainers agree that Sade doesn’t need to share more than she already has. The music is enough. One prominent radio programmer described Sade as “shy” at a recent meet and greet with top-level programmers. The event was designed to influence them to play her new

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that she doesn’t necessarily recognize it. It’s there and there’s a certain kind of sensuality that she just exudes without even trying.”

#### UNCHANGED BY FAME

Sade loved the fame that came with premiere album *Diamond Life*—and hit singles, “Smooth Operator,” “Hang on to Your Love” and “Your Love is King”—which peaked in popularity in 1985. She didn’t love that her music was initially marketed only to Blacks.

“When we first came to America, I was really surprised that our record was first of all given out to the Black stations rather than the Black and the White stations at the same time,” explains Sade. “I thought, ‘What a strange thing that was because music is for everybody and we are all, underneath, exactly the same.’ I thought it was insulting.”

Now 51, she’s since matured in her understanding of the music industry, which trades hard upon separation of musical formats. In actuality, *Diamond Life* was also an instant hit on smooth jazz radio—the same format that in many markets is being phased out of existence.

“I’ve always thought it strange in music how stations can be sort of separate. But that comes from the history of music and how music is perceived and not just the way people are perceived. You know, I’ve got Black friends who like country and western music. And I’ve got White friends who like rhythm and blues or jazz. Thankfully, we’ve sort of transcended. I’m glad to be a part of that.”

At that point in time, the iconic image of Sade’s red lipstick, hoop earrings, long ponytail and seductive dance moves became synonymous with beauty. Women and men alike swooned at the sound of her voice and the sight of her large, kohl-rimmed eyes. She said then, and still says now, sexy means that less is more.

album. “She didn’t do much meeting or greeting, but she looked great,” says the person who asked not to be identified.

And then there are those who adore her, have yet to actually meet her, but are dramatically influenced by her. Drake, 2010’s “it” rapper, told EBONY he would love to do a duet with Sade. He would even keep it clean for her. The Wu-Tang Clan’s Raekwon adds that Sade is one to study. “She exudes all of the *right* qualities [of] a musical artist and has always remained humble. Her career has stood the test of time in a way that most artists’ [careers] don’t. It has been an honor to learn and watch through her music, videos and her overall body of work.”

Turntable superstar Kid Capri appreciates Sade’s ghostlike qualities. The public will never tire of her because she will never become overexposed, he says. “She don’t even know [that] her music is more admired than she gets credit for ... The thing I always used to say about Sade was that you hardly see her in videos, or on TV, and she don’t talk a lot. She’s not in anybody’s face all the time. She’s authentic. She disappears, she comes back, and that’s pretty much how you need to do it.”

Sade, who plans to tour with this new album, is humbled by the praise. She’s surprised that so many different kinds of people enjoy her work.

Robinson says the every-couple-of-years-or-so timetable is the best music business plan around. “This allows her fans the time to really, truly miss her.”

Perhaps that’s why Sade’s music has no boundaries; Japanese, American, Brazilian, Nigerian—she is beloved by all. On this topic, she once again is at a loss for words. “I’m not sure how that happened,” she says, “but I’m very glad it did.” □