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For over a year now Britain, Europe and, most recently, America have been swooning at the cool gaze and cooler tunes of a lady called Sade (pronounced Shar-day). Her songs of svelte gigolos, sweet soul love and sticky noir passion have played soundtrack to middle-class romances and shop-floor dreams, from the sleaziest wine bar to the ritziest restaurant. And the message to the masses is clear: Get sophisto, get Sade.



THE SADE ADU

BY PAUL SIMPER

BUT HOW DOES the role reflect the player? Is Sade the product of some Swiss finishing school for young soul songstresses? Or just a downbeat gal with lofty dreams?

In fact Sade's neither princess nor pauper. Born in Nigeria, she moved to West Bergholt, a village in Britain's Essex countryside, when she was four. After that it was to Clacton, a smalltime English sea resort, where the local perception of good times is one glass of Babycham over the odds, and dry wit comes in the shape of a little green monkey trying to put its dick in your ear. Sade's only hardship was a poverty of culture. "Clacton is a bit of a dead-end place," admits the young singer. "You can't go any further physically round the English coast. That's it. If you want to get out you have to go the other way and that's London." Sade moved to London, spent three years at St. Martin's College of Fashion (learning how to design men's clothes), did a spot of modelling ("the worst job known to man. I used to do anything to get out of it, it was so boring") and then on the eve of sitting down to outwrite Erica Jong in the glitzy porn stakes ("I'd just bought a couple of her books and I thought I could do it"), Sade became a singer.

"Sade wasn't one of those people who was passion-

ate to be a singer," says her hip young writer boyfriend Robert Elms. "For her it was more 'what can I do quite well that I quite like, that will enable me to live the way I want to live'..."

"I've always lived above my means," smiles Sade. "And I still do—it's just now my means are greater!"

Singing saw to that. Her debut album *Diamond Life* (which will be followed by a second this autumn) has already sold well over 5 million copies worldwide. In places like Holland she's even outsold Michael Jackson (a quarter of a million to his 180,000 for *Thriller*). And yet three years ago Sade had never even sung solo before an audience. She got off to a good start. "We did a showcase at Ronnie Scott's, the jazz club," she remembers. "It was mostly friends there and a lot of record company people trying to decide what they were going to waste their precious money on (Sade finally signed a highly lucrative deal with Epic almost a year later).

"The band went on and started doing Timmy Thomas' 'Why Can't We Live Together,' the idea being that I come on after their intro. Unfortunately the new dress I'd got for the big occasion was a bit tricky to get on, so by the time I was all together the song had finished.

"I think the boys thought I'd run away. So they all

came off and we started all over again."

Sade's not a girl to be fazed. When manager Lee Barrett originally got her in as the second girl singer in the hip London-based funk group Pride, she'd had just one singing lesson and a lot of training in the bath.

"Lee asked me if I could sing because he said I looked as if I probably could. I said 'yes' because I just thought I probably could."

As Pride kept working towards an ambitious dream where both the band as a whole and singers Sade and Barbara Robinson would all be signed under a three-part deal, it became apparent that Sade and her group (including Pride members Stuart Matthewman on sax and Paul Denman on bass) was the most likely jewel in the crown. Her solo spot then was only one song, "Diamond Life" (later to become "Smooth Operator"), but everyone agreed she had something. Basically, a lot of style, a great song and a voice that was starting to grow.

As time went on, it was obvious to those close to the band that it was these last two attributes—not the first—that would see her on to greater things. Sade could use her looks for the good of her press—*The Face*, for instance, gave her a back cover almost a year before her first record. But it was her work with



STORY

songwriting partner Stuart Matthewman and the cultivation of a unique if originally brittle vocal style (she got the personality before she got the notes) that moved her on up.

Much has been written about Sade's "cool." This aura she radiates as she strolls through life, like some lone sophisticate—Lonnnetta McKee living *The Cotton Club* for real.

"Cynics think she's being cool and aloof onstage," says Matthewman, "but she's just nervous. Sade's never really relaxed up there, which I think is part of her charm—she's quite a naive performer." Her performance may be naive, but her attitude to the music business isn't.

Contrast her musical rise with that of another stylish lady, Grace Jones. Jones had style. Had class. Had the very capable Jean-Paul Goude. But had a hit? Not never. The first time the darling of the New York club scene stepped into the spotlight proper, it was as a cultured Amazonian assassin trying to blast the wrinkles off agent 007.

The trick is master—or rather *mistress*—and servant. While Grace Jones, like any good model, could act out the role laid down for her, Sade does her own bedmaking.

Epic has already tried to voice its opinion on how

this girl should go. "Half black, half white singing soulpop—let's sell her as Diana Ross." But Sade wouldn't go for it. Now her press is done independent of the company, her tours are organized through Reformation (the rapidly expanding office of club soulmates Spandau Ballet), and her artwork is done by a friend Graham Smith (the artist responsible for all the early neo-classic Spandau sleeves and Blue Rondo A La Turk's jazz retro). With that much control, Sade's not about to lose herself in some chocolate box factory. She doesn't need—and doesn't intend—to live the image.

Sade's not one to pose around town. Posing's for the nervous and insecure, and Sade's neither of those.

"I don't like nightclubs that much," she says. "I was never somebody who spent my life down at The Blitz. That's too boring. I'd got to the pictures or go for a meal with friends."

The world of Sade is a very private one, but not in the Garbo sense. She just knows who she likes and who she wants to be around. People like clothes designer Melissa Caplan, who would be more than happy to clip her round the ear if she ever got pretentious.

"But Sade doesn't make a big show of anything,"

says Melissa. "Some people go into a club to be important people, while others go because they want a night out—Sade's like the latter. For her, your private life is your private life. There's no point having millions of acquaintances when you have to act out a part for them."

There's quite a lot of Madonna in Sade. The English girl may not share the American's gaucheness—and no, she's never posed sunny-side up for the cameras, in case you were wondering—but both have a surety and control that is not only enviable but almost unparalleled in their field.

It's probably fair to say that Sade's audience is the one that those independent Madonna girls will grow into five years from now. Basically, the two girls have just picked different characters.

While Madonna sex-kittens it up with her "diamonds are a girl's best friend" skit, Sade goes for the cool hurt of a forties B-movie (see the Julien Temple video for "Smooth Operator"). Both have a self-knowledge which, although it may grate with those musical purists who think soul should burst blindly from the heart, is a quality highly attractive to girls who for years have been fed man-made dreams. We are no Blondie. Madonna spells it out with "Material Girl" but the irony of Sade's storytelling has passed some people by. When Sade sings of "the diamond life" on "Smooth Operator" it's not some secret wish fulfillment, just some story popped in an oyster of an arrangement.

Sade's music may have sheen but it's not the ritzy bland of *Dallas*, more the sympathetically packaged scrutiny of, say, Schrader's *American Gigolo*. Beneath the icing lies some cake.

Much of Sade's independence both as a songwriter and human being stems from her upbringing. Sade's always been an outsider. Moving with her mother from Nigeria when she was four, Sade and brother Banji were never going to be traditional English types. Being half black, half white, being someone strange in Clacton, coming from a broken home, there was no way they would ever fall happily in line with those weird conservative customs of cultural xenophobia. She never learned that English smallmindedness. Sade has never been interested in "coming from" anywhere. She finds the exotica in which the press shrouds her Nigerian ancestry as amusing as their reverence for her "cool." Her mother, Anne, taught her that independence.

"I never really influenced what Sade would do," she says. "I've always felt that people find their own way. I always encouraged them to do what they want."

Even as a child then, Sade escaped the stereotype. And undoubtedly it's this freedom of thought that has helped her break so quickly internationally.

Unlike most British artists—and we're talking here about filmmakers like Hugh Hudson and Bill Forsyth as much as pop stars like Paul Weller—Sade doesn't write like she's living on an island. Her songs aren't localized. And if they are—as in the case of "Sally"—they're as likely to be set in New York (a place she's particularly fond of, having played two early shows at Danceteria) as London.

Sade's hero is Robert Mitchum, not Rupert Everett. Through movies, through reading, through living her life, she's made sure she's grasped a lot more than the tiny world of Clacton. This year she starts to tour that brave new world extensively. Starting this November with shows in England (culminating in two prestigious nights at London's Royal Albert Hall) Sade then comes over to America for eight dates before Xmas (including Radio City on Dec. 10). Then, after a New Year break, it's all over Europe, New Zealand and Australia.

It's a crucial time for the girl and her band. She made a big step in the right direction recently at Wembley's Live Aid when she showed that she was able to handle a stadium audience as well as the more rarefied atmosphere of a club crowd. While Alison Moyet was doing her best to play Tina Turner to Paul Young's Mick Jagger, Sade just got on with being herself and now she's doing that better every time. An album as successful as *Diamond Life* will be hard to follow, but Sade and her band have never been short of material, and the one new track already previewed in her live set ("Is It a Crime") takes on the sort of epic proportions usually associated with the very best of the Vandross team. Perhaps the question with Sade is not "how much further can she go?" but "how much further does she want to?" So far, she's had a successful modeling, singing and writing career. When she was younger, she was also a runner-up in a national British newspaper's photographic competition and now she's also expressing an interest in going into film production (she does actually sing in the forthcoming British movie *Absolute Beginners*). But then it's tough having so little *going* for you...