

# Q&A with local soul sensation Claire Phillips

By  Lauren Hartzenberg

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Cape Town-born singer, songwriter and musician [Claire Phillips](#) once again formed part of the stellar local line-up at the year's Cape Town International Jazz Festival (CTIJF).



Image credit: Nicholas Felix

Raised in the Cape Flats suburb of Belhar, music has played a fundamental role in the singer's life from a young age. Phillips began singing as a toddler and taught herself to play piano, saxophone and drums, but it's the guitar that you'll find her wielding at most performances.

Her impressive vocal range and quality repertoire of original music earned her a SAMA for her debut album *Say My Name* in 2007 and the reputation as one of the country's top R&B soul musicians.

Following her debut performance at CTIJF in 2014, Phillips returned to the Basil 'Manenberg' Coetzee stage this past weekend, where a flock of loyal fans braved the rain to witness the songstress belt out their favourite hits.

We caught up with Phillips ahead of the festival to talk about her path to music and the influences that have shaped her sound.

## ■ *How do you feel about performing again at the CTIJF this year?*

I think for any artist this is one of the biggest jazz festivals in the world, so I'd be a fool to not want to be part of that. Being asked to perform again says to me that I did a good job the last time and I intend to do an even better job this time around.



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## ■ *Growing up in Belhar, how do you think your upbringing has influenced your music?*

Strangely enough, I grew up in the musical section of Belhar where all the roads are named after instruments and composers. My dad always played in a band so there was always music around me. When other kids would opt to play outside I'd be at the back checking out the drums and the keyboards. Staying there, the music influence was always rich, warm and soulful. I think it plays a big part in why I have the sound that I do.

■ ***When did you know you wanted to pursue music as a career?***

I've always known, I was just scared to say it. I was in Standard 2 (Grade 4) and the teacher went around the class asking everybody what they wanted to be when they grew up, and I thought 'this is my chance, I'm going to say I want to sing'. But I said it and everybody laughed at me. At that time music wasn't seen as a career, it was seen as a hobby.

Guess who's laughing now...

■ ***What would be your ultimate gig?***

I'd say Madison Square Garden. That's the ultimate gig. For many artists, it's the most revered venue in the world.

■ ***And any particular artists you'd like to perform with?***

I'd love to work with Alicia Keys, I'd kill to work with Jill Scott. Erykah Badu, definitely. And then someone that I've worked with before on the same stage is Robert Glasper. He's playing this year again so it's going to be great to see him.

■ ***Your music sounds like it's influenced by a mixture of jazz, soul and R&B. Do you think the younger generations still hold an appreciation for these genres of music?***

Of course, definitely. I have so many mini-me fans you wouldn't believe it - eight-year-olds, nine-year-olds, you name it. These kids love my music and I wouldn't always say that my lyrical content is necessarily suitable for children. \*laughs\*

But music is a feeling and if you can evoke a feeling in somebody regardless of the sex or age, then you've got something.

I feel like radio also has a lot of influence on what these kids listen to. They're playing all this American bubble-gum pop, which I don't really think is music. It's more of a formula that they've got going. And these kids grow up with that. But play them something real and you'll find they will still react to it.

### ■ ***What's next for Claire Phillips?***

The world is my oyster, that's what's next for me. I've got a couple of singles coming out, I'm working on an album, hopefully going on tour internationally. The world is my oyster right now. What can I say, as an artist I'm like a fine wine, I just get better with time! \*smirks\*

## ABOUT LAUREN HARTZENBERG

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