



MUSIC MATTERS – THE ASIA PACIFIC MUSIC FORUM

INTERVIEW WITH JAMIE CULLUM

JAMIE CULLUM, singer/songwriter/pianist, is the UK's most successful jazz artist and with 4 million albums sold, a Grammy, a Brit and 2 Golden Globe nominations to his name, he certainly knows a lot about international success in the music industry.

Rocketed to fame in his early 20's, Cullum has taken the music world by storm with a headline tour of over 40 countries, and a collection of smash hits. In Asia specifically he has gone Platinum in Singapore, and Gold in Hong Kong, Indonesia and Thailand. Cullum has toured extensively throughout Asia, including Japan at Fuji Rock, Hong Kong and Singapore.

At the **Music Matters** forum in Hong Kong, Cullum will be interviewed at the piano about his life and inspirations by music industry legend, Ralph Simon. Music Matters delegates will have the unique opportunity to ask the 29-year-old singer-songwriter-pianist questions on his experiences as an artist in today's music business.

Ahead of his upcoming performance and interview session at Music Matters, Cullum talked to Scott Murphy from his kitchen in London, at length about how the past has prepared him for the present and the future.

Greetings Jamie. Let's talk about some recent events first. I understand that you'll be appearing on the American TV show "Dancing with The Stars" in the States soon?

Cullum: Absolutely, but to be honest I don't really know about the show. I know it's a big deal to be on there though, so I'm excited. It is a surprise and I'm not supposed to tell you what I'm playing, but I'll tell you anyway: "I Get A Kick Out Of You".

I'm sure that whatever you perform, you'll be singing better than contestant Denise Richards recently did.

Cullum: They needed something two minutes and thirty five minutes...and that's difficult. It's a real challenge, but we found a place where it's going to work quite well.

Where are you right now?

Cullum: I'm in my kitchen in London.

You were recently in Africa on a special trip. Tell me about it.

Cullum: That was really incredible. I went up there with Unicef. They were talking to me about their projects and they said we are making a field trip to Ethiopia to talk about the projects and they said they would love for me to come. IT was amazing, moving, exciting, fun and you get a sense of the work that Unicef do out there. You get a sense of the good things that they can accomplish.

What were your thoughts on Ethiopia?

Cullum: Ethiopia is an amazing, brilliant country. It's the only African country that's never been colonized. I was also familiar with Mulatu Astatke, one of the architects of Ethiopian jazz music. He's not an influence, but I'm a big fan. It turns out that Unicef heard one of my new songs which they

really liked. They're not really interested in HPS, high profile supporters, unless they are engaged in what they do. I think it was a sequence of events that enabled it to happen and it was certainly beneficial to me. They can now use the photos and help out with the charity.

What did you do there?

Cullum: We visited some youth centers and spent time re-housing children who lost their parents. We went to the village where Unicef is distributing community work. We were helping mothers, visited a water source and went to another center that was developed by a woman who was dealing with medical and psychological concerns. We looked into the financing. I was out there for four days and it was busy from morning until night. There was no downtime, but it was an extraordinary trip.

Now let's go back to the past when you were first getting started as a musician. Did you envision where you would be today?

Cullum: It's a tough one to explain. My goals were somewhat different. I was really into piano and playing. My goals were musician's goals. I didn't think a lot of people were ripe for signing, so when things started to happen, I went with it. What can I say? Candid was my first deal. They were a respected label. They weren't offering me millions of pounds. I did a few gigs and that was that. When Universal came knocking it was even more confusing.

At one point you were even playing at a Pizza Express in Soho...

Cullum: There are many Pizza Expresses in London and I played at loads of different ones. But the one in Soho is one of London's great jazz clubs. Top jazz musicians were playing in there. That's when Universal started getting interested. This is a place that's down the street from Ronnie Scott's. It was a really long process as far as Universal was concerned. They came to gigs for about six months and I was recording "Twentysomething" before I actually signed my deal. Six to eight months later, the deal was signed so it had time to soak in.

It's interesting that your earliest recordings are now fetching a small fortune on Ebay.

Cullum: It IS flattering. I recorded my earliest stuff with a student loan. I really wanted to make a record. I did weddings and bars and clubs while I was at university, and people kept asking if I had a CD to sell. In my opinion, it's not a very good record.

What did you learn about the business side of the industry?

Cullum: I've learned that it's definitely a business. My kind of personality tries to be everyone's friend, but business is very different. You have to get the business aspect right but not lose the core of who you are, it's hard actually. The business side of it is fiercely business-like. It doesn't add up to the ego and the fragile self worth of a musician. We're ruthlessly critical. It's also making sure that you're an artist and when you make an album that can sell, that almost never matches up. It's not an easy road and because I straddle both worlds, it's doubly difficult.

Looking back on your concert in Hong Kong, what were your thoughts?

Cullum: Yes, it was amazing! I couldn't believe how many people were there. I thought we'd be playing a club. I remember that one very fondly. Aside from that, we went out and I'm trying to remember the where and how. We had some good food and went to a great bar.

Considering that it was the AsiaWorld-Arena, do you wish the venue was smaller?

Cullum: I love the challenge of doing different places. I love playing big show but you can't beat the atmosphere of a small show. I love to do both.

Having been out here, what are three things that excite you about the Asian entertainment business?

Cullum: That's a tough question. To be honest, I don't feel I know enough about it. But one of the great things is that it is clearly one of the places where the music industry is growing, because everyone else is shrinking. I've had a great deal of success in Asia. We've done great gigs, we sell records, have had people sleeping at the airport. I'm only too happy when I see fans who are supportive and pleased because of my music.

Your mother has Burmese roots. Does that make playing in Asia seem more important to you?

Cullum: My Mom's family left during difficult circumstances, so she didn't grow up with a Burmese identity, but it's reflected in a touch of the exotic look and the skin color. She was raised in England, but having said that, I'm desperate to go there actually. As for her, she tends to worry whenever I travel anywhere. She's a traditional worrier.

After Music Matters, you'll be playing a show at New York's famed Carnegie Hall. How do you feel about that?

Cullum: That's very exciting and very nerve wracking. Everyone knows that joke about Carnegie Hall. It's part of the vernacular. We'll have some special New York musicians for that one.

Do you feel more comfortable without a set list, as you're known to do?

Cullum: I don't really have a show. They're all pretty different. It really is. It takes a lot out of me without having a framework, but then at the same time, you have a freshness on stage. Instead of "Oh my, there's no framework" it's more exciting that way. I don't know how people can play the same songs night after night. That would drive me insane.

The downside is that you might forget what to do next. Has that ever happened?

Cullum: It happens all the time and that makes it exciting. I'll end up talking to the audience for about 20 minutes and then something will come. Something WILL come to me.

You recently worked with Clint Eastwood on the film soundtrack for "Gran Torino". Did he live up to his legend status?

Cullum: He was the best, really, really, really amazing. That was an incredible experience and it came together in such an honest way. He's a very likeable guy and easy to get along with. He is Clint Eastwood, so it can't be easy being him, but in terms of hanging out it was a joy. We had breakfast, drank a bottle of beer and it was nice.

He's not the first legend you worked with. You also performed with Burt Bacharach. What was that like?

Cullum: If anyone is interested in writing songs...and I certainly have hummed his songs for years and marveled at the construction with him. When we were running through the songs he was very specific about them and I was impressed by the way he protected music and was fiercely connected to it.

Do you ever catch yourself thinking "I'm with a living legend?"

Cullum: There's always that sense and I pinch myself. I'm just glad that I can rise to the challenge. The problem is that people rise so fast these days that they don't have the tools ready to go. It's quite a difficult thing to be told specific beat info by Bacharach, but playing a lot of gigs set me up for it.

What's more exciting: playing in front of the Queen or with Bacharach?

Cullum: It's an honor playing for the Queen, but she's not going to shout out when I play the wrong note, but he will.

What are the most special gigs in your career for you?

Cullum: There are so many because it's a different challenge playing at Glastonbury and a place in Boston. It's hard to pick out just one moment.

You've got a new album coming out soon...

Cullum: Absolutely. I'm extremely proud of what I've done. I hope it's coming out after the summer.

What are your thoughts on the music industry today?

Cullum: The industry has to catch up with what's going on. I'm a music fan as much as the next guy. I spend a lot of money on records still because occasionally I have albums that were deleted on MP3...and fine, somebody's covered for you. But because it's so easy to get music now, it's much harder to hold people's attention. That means you have to rise to the challenge. That also means that a core audience can help you out. If you keep them close to you, it's as exciting a time as there ever was. We have to stop prosecuting the 12 year old downloader and make it easier for him not to steal. I don't have a solution. All I know is that when certain albums come out, I'll do anything to hear it. If the music is good enough, then you'll be into it. That simple power has not changed. The way we consume it has. You can't slam things down people's throats anymore. That's got to be a good thing.

Are these the types of things you'll be talking about at Music Matters?

Cullum: I'm just going to go with the flow there.

What's an album that changed your life?

Cullum: "Headhunters" with Herbie Hancock. It was the first album that was really a jazz album that made me think about the power of jazz. "Love Supreme" by John Coltrane too. It made me feel something that I haven't felt before.

What are your personal mottos?

Cullum: Find what you love and do it for the rest of your life.

You're also not afraid to mix it up. I hear you've been working with Pharell on stuff.

Cullum: I'm interested in defining jazz in the present tense. It's a discussion of where jazz is and trying to get past that and looking to see what's out there now. It's using influences that are as much of what's around you at the moment as what is in the past. It's mixing Count Basie with Pharell.

Any ambitions to work with someone you haven't yet?

Cullum: Millions of people. I'd love to make a track with Madlib for starters. He's got such knowledge of music. I think we would do something interesting.

You're 30th birthday is coming up. Is that changing your outlook on things and how do you feel?

Cullum: It's great. I'm looking forward to it. The 20s have been fun. I'm in a good place so I feel it's a good time to be 30.

And what can we expect at Music Matters?

Cullum: I've not done anything like this Hong Kong thing, so it could be really fun. I'm looking forward to doing it. Come to Hong Kong, play some music, talk a little, sit at the piano. It will be great. It's the stuff of life!

ABOUT MUSIC MATTERS:

Attended by an abundance of industry heavyweights from Asia and around the world, Music Matters is the only conference of its kind in Asia, offering delegates the chance to connect, forge business

partnerships and create new business opportunities. In addition to the forum there are three parties showcasing up-and-coming acts from around the Asia-Pacific region.

Now in its fourth year, Music Matters is a forum created with, by and for the Asian music industry and has become a permanent, must-attend fixture on the global music industry calendar. It is solutions driven, featuring face-to-face sessions, keynote presentations and discussion panels with some of the most innovative and successful companies and individuals in the businesses of music, entertainment and technology.

Previous speakers include: **Paul McGuinness** (Manager, **U2**), **Edgar Bronfman Jr.** (Chairman & CEO, **Warner Music Group**), **Edison Chen** (Artist), **Sam Duann** (President, **Rock Records Co. Ltd**), **Terry McBride** (CEO, **Netzwerk Music Group** and Manager **Avril Lavigne**), the **IFPI's John Kennedy**, **Charles Huang** (Co-inventor of **Guitar Hero**), Globally renowned concert promoter **Harvey Goldsmith**, **Haji Taniguchi** (Managing Director, **Avex Group Holdings Inc**), **Tero Ojanperä** (EVP, Head of Entertainment, **Nokia**) and many others sharing the stage with a wealth of other local Asian and international music business leaders.

Created, managed and promoted by Hong Kong based entertainment marketing company, **Branded Limited**, the Music Matters programme is customised with the assistance of an advisory board comprising of senior representatives from across the entertainment value chain including major record companies, independents, promoters, digital retail, lawyers, financiers, mobile and media owners. The ongoing success of Music Matters clearly reflects the deserved attention that the Asia Pacific is receiving from the rest of the world and demonstrates that the business of Music... Matters!

Plug into Asia!

Ends

Music Matters Event Information:

www.musicmattersasia.com

June 2nd – 4th, 2009 (Forum on June 3rd and 4th)
Grand Ballroom, Grand Hyatt, Hong Kong

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