



JAMELIA

In a singing career that began at the age of 15, Jamelia Davis has achieved plenty: Top Five singles and albums around the world, sell-out tours, MOBO Awards, and collaborations with the likes of Beenie Man and Coldplay's Chris Martin. In 2008, she performed a duet with South African star Loyiso Bala for Nelson Mandela's 90th birthday party. Her fifth album is expected to be released in 2009.

Growing up in inner-city Birmingham, Jamelia's musical roots are steeped in reggae, but there is one artist who has remained a constant influence since childhood: Gladys Knight.

Nicknamed 'The Empress of Soul', the American R&B singer was a particular favourite of Jamelia's mother Paulette. And it was Paulette, a playschool manager, who, inadvertently, ignited her daughter's love affair.

"When I started to get really interested in music and buying singles, I can remember my mum playing Gladys Knight songs and then finding a compilation album of hers that had been misplaced," remembers Jamelia today. "I must have been about 8 or 9 years old, and my mum would play it over and over again and I just loved it! It was the emotion and everything behind the way that she sang. You just know that she has lived every word and note she sings. I was very intrigued and excited about her.

"Her music is like a comfort blanket," she adds. "It's been familiar to me in lots of different circumstances. If I'm down I'll put on a Gladys Knight song and remember being young; or if I want to have a good old sing song at home then I know it'll lift my spirits."

And that passion is now being transferred to a new generation: "Even my children know her songs, so she's connecting three generations of my family. That's what music is supposed to do – it's supposed to travel and become almost classical. Gladys Knight is like that. She's timeless."