

JAZMINE SULLIVAN

A Jazmine Sullivan record can go down like a shot of cognac—spicy, yet full-bodied and smooth as butter—or it can swathe you in the warmest embrace like your favorite pashmina. It’s why we fell in love with her a dozen years ago when she first burst on the scene with fiery records about the push and pull of romance. At the center of every Jazmine Sullivan album—from her 2008 debut *Fearless* to 2015’s *Reality Show*—is the point of view of a modern Black woman. She could be your sister, your girlfriend, your homegirl, or the woman you’ve judged based on the curated life she presents on IG or reality TV. Jazmine has spent her career painting vivid worlds of everyday women through poetic records that are unflinchingly raw, vulnerable and poignant. And it’s that commitment to giving it to us straight, no chaser, that serves as the foundation of her new project *Heaux Tales* (RCA Records).

Heaux Tales is Jazmine Sullivan’s first release since the critically lauded *Reality Show*, a six-year hiatus that she’s the first to admit wasn’t entirely planned. “I always take breaks to give myself a breather, but time just got away from me,” she says with a laugh. “When you’re going on, living your regular life, time slips away.”

A conceptual project born out of conversations Jazmine had with her sisterfriends, *Heaux Tales* is inspired by a sisterhood of women bonded by their desire to stand in their power and take agency over how they see themselves in a world working so hard to define and judge them. *Heaux Tales* takes Jazmine’s knack for masterful storytelling to another level by placing several protagonists at the center. The records are steeped in the hard-earned wisdom and unvarnished truths shared between Jazmine and her friends. These are tales of lust, insecurities, betrayal, regret, empowerment and the desire for love and security (even if just superficial), presented with the intimacy and honesty we’ve come to expect from the Philadelphia native.

“It’s one thing to say these things to your girlfriends in the privacy of y’all’s space but to put it on record and people hear it and, perhaps, judge them? That was a lot to ask, but I have wonderful dynamic friends that trusted me with their stories and I was so grateful for that,” she says. “The tales are the meat of the project. Even if you can’t connect with the songs, you can connect with the words someone is telling you about their life and the conversations and stories we have as women.”

The idea of creating *Heaux Tales* started as Jazmine contemplated the direction for her next proper album. She was feeling stuck, creatively, and the pressure to follow up *Reality Show*—a critical blockbuster of an album that debuted at No. 1 on Billboard’s R&B Albums chart received three Grammy nominations and appeared on numerous “Best of” lists—was growing more intensely as the years passed.

“I wasn’t really sure where I wanted the album to go and then I started thinking about doing something conceptualized. Creating a theme and doing something based off of that, instead of thinking of it as *the next big project*,” she says. “I grew up doing plays. My mom had me in acting camps and she wrote plays that I would be in or I was always watching them. The suggestion of a conceptual project made me feel better. When you take such big breaks, people are like, ‘Okay, so what’s the next thing? It has to be bigger. It has to be better.’ Some people deal with the pressure great. For me, it can be stifling. It helped to be able to do something that I could put into a little box.”

Informed by the conversations she was having with her girlfriends about love and life, the records of *Heaux Tales* took shape in bits and pieces—a verse here, a hook there. Jazmine brought a recorder to meet with friends or had them record themselves at home for the tales that became the project’s connective tissue. The story of Amanda, a woman who has found great comfort—and profound sadness—in the power of her sex was the turning point for the project after it inspired “Girl Like Me,” a searing duet with H.E.R. underscoring the beauty of sisterhood that is the bedrock of the project.

“It was so honest, and heart wrenching,” Jazmine remembers of hearing Amanda’s tale for the first time. “A lot of women these days take their value from social media. We see these women with perfect bodies and seemingly perfect lives and you can’t help but compare yourself. You can get lost in the loop and start to feel like you’re not good enough and I wanted to speak to that.”

“Bodies” sets the tone for *Heaux Tales*. Unspooling like a juicy television soap opera, Jazmine narrates the morning after a random sexual conquest like a string of sober texts to a group chat. “Gotta stop getting fucked up, what did I have in my cup? / I don’t know where I woke up / I keep on pressing my luck / I don’t know where I woke up,” she sings before checking herself: “Bitch, get it together bitch!”

Working piecemeal on the records for *Heaux Tales* allowed Jazmine to explore a different approach to storytelling as both a writer and a vocalist without the pressure of having to consider “I’m a storyteller at heart ... but I learned that I don’t have to do those things I thought I had to in order to connect with people in songs. I learned to be more confident in the nuances of my voice, and the emotions I was exploring. It was eye opening really to take a different route and still get to the same destination—the finish line.”

She found power in restraint, allowing her gospel-drenched voice to smolder more than it belted which makes records like the project’s somber first single, “Lost One,” and the wistful ballad “The Other Side” so emotionally devastating. Jazmine brings each tales to life with powerful command and profound vulnerability. She channels a woman that fantasizes about a man showering her with cash and lavish gifts on the Anderson .Paak-assisted “Price Tags”; she brings her signature ferocity to the explosive breakup banger “Pick Up Your Feelings”; unabashedly details the potent spell Vitamin D can put one under on “Put It Down” and “On It,” a cheeky collaboration with Ari Lennox, who also narrates her own confessional. The 14-track project features production from Key Wane, DZL, Cardiak & Wu10, J Mo, Dev Hynes, Dave “Pop” Watson, Dilemma, JoeLogic & Gee and Bongo ByTheWay.

“What I wanted to create with this project is sisterhood. I can’t imagine getting through all that I’ve gone through without the women in my life—my girlfriends, my mom, my aunts,” Jazmine says. “I’ve put so much pressure on myself over the years, but I’ve learned that if people are fans of you they just want to hear you and feel where you are. Doing this project helped me take that pressure off myself. It helped me stop being so hard on myself. This project is about being who you are confidently. Not letting anyone dictate how you present or the space you take up.”

###