



## DANIEL MERRIWEATHER

### *Love & War*

You may already be familiar with the powerhouse pipes of **Daniel Merriweather**, the 27-year-old Australian who lends his old-soul voice to “Stop Me” — an ingenious mash-up of The Smiths’ “Stop Me If You Think You’ve Heard This One Before” and The Supremes’ “You Keep Me Hangin’ On” that appears on DJ/producer Mark Ronson’s eclectic album *Version*. The track dominated the top of the airplay charts in the UK in April 2007 and led the British press to tout Merriweather as an artist to watch. Daniel’s debut album *Love & War* has soared to the top of the charts upon release in the UK this past summer when the album debuted at #2 on the UK charts. The album’s first US single “Red” has been celebrated as the UK’s #2 most played single of the year, debuted Top 5 on the singles chart and has been certified platinum in the UK. Also, Daniel won the ARIA Award (Australia’s “Grammys”) for Best Male Artist and was nominated for 2 MTV European Music Awards.

And on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2010, Daniel Merriweather, a singer, songwriter, and performer will be releasing *Love & War* in the US, which was tipped by *Rolling Stone* in the magazine’s Spring Music Preview as one of the year’s hottest albums.

“Working on ‘Stop Me’ planted this idea in my head that things don’t have to fit in the same box that they originally came in,” Merriweather says. “On *Love & War*, it’s as if I took all of my influences, shook them up in a box, and came up with a bunch of songs that I think stand away from any one particular genre. I’m as inspired by Q-Tip and A Tribe Called Quest as I am by Vivaldi, Stevie Wonder, Jeff Buckley or D’Angelo. There are artists who are archivists—they make music directly derived from music they love. I make music by subconsciously blending things I’ve heard throughout my life.”

The result is an album that pulses with gritty hip-hop beats, ’60s soul keyboards and horns, warm textures of acoustic and electric guitar, and cinematic string arrangements, all anchored by Merriweather’s combustible vocals. *Love & War* is also a showcase for this young Aussie’s considerable songwriting talents. Merriweather wrote nearly every song on the album on acoustic guitar with various musician friends, and then presented his compositions to Ronson, who produced the album, and his backing band, The Dap-Kings (of Sharon Jones and the Dap Kings, who also played on Amy Winehouse’s *Back to Black* and Ronson’s *Version*). “It was interesting because the Dap-Kings have a very specific sound and my songs are quite different from what they would normally write,” Merriweather says. “So it was cool to have them reinterpret chord progressions and come up with arrangements for songs that they wouldn’t naturally play. There are a lot of happy accidents on the album.”

One happy accident turned out to be one of Merriweather’s favorite songs: “Cigarettes” — a cry-in-your-beer tale of royally screwing up a relationship. “For all intents and purposes, it’s a country song,” Merriweather says. “We used country chords, but it wasn’t written like that deliberately. I gave the band a melody and a chord progression and they took it to a different place.” “Cigarettes” also illustrates another essential truth about *Love & War*: If you strip back the bells and whistles, the album is, at its core, a singer-songwriter album that brims with classic storytelling and semi-autobiographical tales. “You should never let the truth get in the way of a good

yarn," Merriweather says. "I've had a lot of experiences for a 27-year-old and there are a lot of personal stories on it, but I do take a bit of poetic license when I write songs."

*Love & War's* opening track, "For Your Money," finds Merriweather trying to survive everyday life in his adopted city of New York (with Sean Lennon channelling his father's spirit on a rousing guitar solo); "Change" (featuring rapper Wale) advises people to look at themselves in the mirror before judging anyone else; and "Chainsaw" is about a dysfunctional relationship that is more destructive than good. Then there's "Red," which Merriweather says has two meanings: "On the surface, it's a song about a relationship gone wrong," he says, "but it's also a metaphor for the way a government can abuse power and mistreat people." (That potent message is underscored by the stunning guitar work of Lennon and Paul Simon's son Harper Simon). "A lot of my songs have a sense of duality," Merriweather says. Finally, the break-up song "Water and a Flame" — a smoky duet with Grammy-Award winning soul singer Adele — conveys a sultry sense of drama that envelops *Love & War*.

"I grew up in a forest listening to classical music from the age of four, then went to a church called Truth and Liberation Concern until the age of 12, what do you expect?" Merriweather says with a laugh. "'Drama' is my middle name." Born and bred in a blue-collar area in Melbourne, Daniel Paul Merriweather was one of three boys born to teacher parents. "We lived in a town at the end of a train line. I spent quite a bit of time on my own as a kid," he says. Merriweather began singing at age 10 after hearing Elvis Presley's "Blue Suede Shoes." "I didn't know who he was, I just liked the sound of his voice," Merriweather recalls. By 1991, he had taught himself to sing by listening to Boyz II Men's *Cooleyhighharmony* album. "I could sing every single song, note for note," Merriweather says. "I could nail every inflection, every vocal acrobatic trick that they did. We didn't have any money so I never bought CDs—I had that album on repeat for two years. It was a big reason why I sang." Merriweather dropped out of high school and got into trouble, landing in court on assault charges and narrowly avoiding jail-time. He worked at KFC for a few months, but "it wasn't for me so I thought I'd try this music lark," he says with a laugh.

At age 20 after performing with various bands in Australia, Merriweather was about to sign a record deal with an independent label in Melbourne, when Ronson called and invited him to New York. The two kept in contact for the next several years and Merriweather sang on Ronson's 2003 debut album *Here Comes The Fuzz*. When Ronson formed his label Allido Records, Merriweather was one of his first signings. (Merriweather subsequently signed an exclusive recording agreement with J Records.) Merriweather relocated to New York and spent 18 months writing and recording the songs that appear on *Love & War*. "I've worked with a ton of producers over the years and have always been very pig-headed about what I want," Merriweather says. "The cool thing about working with Mark is that he let me write the songs and sing them and I let him produce and do what he does so well. Drawing that line in the sand and saying, 'This is what I do and this is what you do' is probably why things turned out as well as they did."

The recording process was punctuated by Merriweather spending months on the road with Ronson's Version Players, including touring the UK and performing at the MTV Video Music Awards, the Brit Awards, and at last year's Glastonbury Festival. "I was constantly around all these amazing musicians," Merriweather says of that time. "In a way it was humbling and put what I was doing in perspective. Now I'm really looking forward to travelling the world with my music. I love performing. Making an album is such a personal thing, so when you get up on stage, it's a whole different type of gratification."

*Love & War* is due from J Records/Allido Records on February 23, 2010.

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