

India Arie brings the 'SongVersation' to Portland



India Arie, shown here performing at the BET Awards in Los Angeles in June, scrapped an earlier album because it didn't feel right and ended up instead with her current record, "SongVersation." (Frank Micelotta/Invision)



By Michele Coppola | Special to The Oregonian
[Follow on Twitter](#)

[Print](#)

on September 19, 2013 at 12:25 AM, updated September 19, 2013 at 2:41 PM



4 shares

"My heart is bruised/That's what happens when you use it."
– India Arie, "Cocoa Butter"

India Arie has always seemed to lead with her heart when it comes to her career. She also followed it down the stairs and out the door of the music business in 2009, after a broken engagement, an exhausting cross-country tour and physical issues left her drained and like the song says, bruised.

She is back now with the album "SongVersation", and a supporting tour which has its second stop at the Aladdin Theater in Portland on Sunday.

Arie has sold over 10 million records worldwide and been nominated for 21 Grammy Awards, including that infamous breakthrough year of 2002 when she left empty handed after being nominated seven times. She eventually won four of them in subsequent years for her guitar-based acoustic R&B that flows smooth—but is not without a definitive point of view. It's something that made her a symbol of empowerment when her first single "Video" proclaimed that while she wasn't a supermodel, she was, in fact, a queen:

MUSIC RESOURCES

Wednesday
3

This week's PDX concert calendar



Concert reviews

LOCAL MUSIC EVENTS

Enter Keyword or Phrase

Enter City or Town

Search

[See All Events »](#)

[Submit Your Events »](#)

MOST READ



Esperanza Spalding's 'Emily's D+Evolution': What critics are saying



Is the CD dead? It is for Kanye West



9 classic rock and folk concerts in Portland in



Hard to believe that someone as undeniably beautiful and athletic as Arie—she’s the daughter of a former pro basketball player—would have ever felt the pangs of insecurity needed to write such a song. There are few people, save possibly Erykah Badu, who are as successful at making maxi dresses and silk turbans look like the most sensual lingerie.

But Arie is not her clothes. Nor is she her hair or skin, both of which have been the subject of song and speculation. She again addressed society’s idea of physicality as identity in 2007’s “I Am Not My Hair”, a song that was immediately relatable to women of every race and especially poignant to those facing baldness as the result of cancer treatment.

The skin became an issue when the promo pictures for “Cocoa Butter” – the first single off of *SongVersation*—were released. Wearing a metallic dress and leaning against a gold backdrop, Arie says her skin was lit “to look luminous”—which also made it appear to some as an attempt to lighten up and sell out. Like the famous are required to do per celebrity bylaws, she pleaded her case to Oprah in an interview earlier this year:





But really, India.Arie is about musical integrity: she shelved a self-funded, bilingual album she'd been working on for three years because it didn't feel right to her for various reasons. Instead of taking a break, she decided to create —another whole album. "Songversation" was released on June 25th and has been well received, which may be largely due to the fact that the music reflects a woman who has a much clearer sense of who she is as a person and as an artist.

"I love where things are on and offstage," she says in a press release from her Soulbird record label. "I trusted my intuition through every line and note of every song on this album, following the flow. And the ease of the flow is always a sign that I am in the right place, doing the right thing. I created SongVersion from that place."

She's obviously proud of her new work, so you can expect to hear much of it in her show Sunday night. Hopefully there will still be time for some of her stellar covers, which include Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit" and a soulful rendition of Don Henley's "Heart of The Matter." Both songs are iconic, and yet Arie makes it hard to believe they weren't hers in the first place.

Perhaps that's because her heart is in it again.

-- Michele Coppola