

For Zainab Sule, it's soft rock all the way

Chuks Oluigbo & Okey Egboluche

She describes herself simply as a girl who would do anything to be different from the rest - simple where others may be flamboyant, and vice versa - someone who pushes herself from within to be extraordinary. And no doubt, her progress so far in her chosen career, music, has been nothing but extraordinary.

Zainab Sule is her name, and she is from the Northern part of Nigeria. She has been singing for a long time, as early as 2002, in the University of Jos, and she recalls vividly how the school crowd in those days made her nerves tense and gave her butterflies in the stomach.

Zainab does much of country and soft rock music currently, and excels in it. But she's also into web designing, to which she dedicates half of her time, while leaving the other half to music, especially recording and rehearsals - and particularly when a song gets in her head.

Her album, Attitude, hit the shelves not long ago, featuring such tracks as "Am not afraid" and "Show some love", both of which have received very good airplay as well as commendations. But how does she feel about the encomiums? She heaves a sigh, and then says, "It increases the tension. The more they praise you, the more they expect from you - it's a challenge on its own."

Even though her Attitude album was self-promoted, she says it did better than she could imagine, in sales as well as in



still much work to be done. And she's currently in the process of recording her next album, Elixir, which she hopes would be out mid-April 2012, and which she promises is going to be unbelievable!

Looking at how good she's with the guitar, you would say she has an obsession for it. But for her, "It's more than an obsession... It's scary. I've always been in love with stringed instruments, but it's the guitar that has that special appeal for me." And her guitar is named Sean.

What about experimenting or crossing over into other genres? She answers straightway: "I have a feeling that my listeners will not be happy with me if I shift base. I tried it in a track in the Attitude album (track 3, i.e., "Things don change,

ft. Tshakes) and reviews didn't pick it. So, I have proof they won't trip for it. I may mix a little bit of hard/alternative rock in future works, but only God knows." That's how far her love for soft rock goes.

Zainab gets the inspiration for her lyrics in the life around her. She says, "Our generation is centred on booze, drugs and sex; no one listens to politicians and pastors anymore, so I believe they'd listen to music if it's done by one of them, and if it makes sense. So, I strive to write songs that would make the average man sit down to think; religion or no..."

The highly gifted songstress is crazily in love with Kelly Clarkson, Carrie Underwood, Garth Brooks, and the old Avril. She looks up to them and they keep

her on.

Her greatest challenge in her music career, she says, has been her chosen genre. This is because, according to her, even though soft rock has a wide fan base, most Nigerians don't appreciate it. They "just wanna party and do the booty call. So they promote more of that." But all hope is not lost, as she adds that "with more of us soft rockers coming out, I believe that will change soon."

How does she rate the Nigerian music industry? Simple: "We've really grown, especially the independent artistes and labels. Even our videos are beginning to have international recognition, like D'Banj and 2face's works."

Though always in high spirits, Zainab also has her low moments, about which she says quite frankly, "I heard somewhere that almost all rock musicians have depressing moments. I do. How do I handle it? I don't. I make sure I'm never alone but with friends and family. Depression is a bad thing. Going through it alone is a dangerous thing."

And she's also not lacking in wise counsels. To aspiring musicians, she says, "Make sure you have another source of income. Music may be your dream, but it needs financing. And no one but you, God and money can take you to that place you deserve to be." And to her fans, she says: "Thanks for standing by me. You guys are the best peeps any musician could ever have. May your days be filled with laughter and love, and tears of happiness."





I Want To Be More Than A Musician – zainabSULE

Zainab Sule, (stylized as zainabSULE), an upcoming artiste based in Abuja is a young lady of many paths. She is a graduate of mathematics, a web designer, and a poet; and she has embraced music with an uncommon passion. Her album "Attitude" is currently making waves in the market, and in this interview with **Jide Dare**, she talks about her music career and her hopes for the future

Who is zainabSULE?
zainabSULE is a young lady in her late 20's; I'm from Auchi in Edo state. I'm a web designer and a musician.
Can you tell us about your family?

I am from a family of five. I was born and brought up in Lagos, but moved to Jos for my university education, and later we moved to Abuja with my mother. So basically I would say I am from Lagos, Jos and Abuja.

What is your educational background?

I studied Mathematics at the University of Jos, and I have a certificate in Web Designing from the University of Iowa. I am an IT-oriented person.

How did music start for you?

I was not born into music. I've always admired musicians like Don Moen, Don Williams, and all these soft rock musicians. From when I was a teenager, I began disturbing my mum to get a guitar for me, and in 2001 she got one for me, though I did not know how to play it. But through the help of some of my foreign friends and from internet, I learnt how to play the guitar, though I started singing in churches when I was in the University in Jos.

What was your parents' reaction to your choice of a music career?

Everybody would like to associate with success. Initially, my father was like God forbid, he said his daughter would not be a Majek Fashek. But after he started seeing the response, his friends would tell him that "Oh we saw your daughter on the T.V", and stuff like that, he started accepting the fact that her daughter is a musician, but my mum has been very supportive from day one. In fact she financed my first video and she is still very supportive.

How would you classify your kind of music?

Let me start with how people classify my music, they say I sing like Tracy Chapman. I would classify it as soft rock; it's a little of Avril Lavigne, and a little of Tracy Chapman, something that you would like to listen to when you want to relax or when you want to reflect and think.

Do you write your own songs?

I write most of my songs, in fact most of them are poems, because I write poems too, so I just convert them to songs. All my songs are written by me, except I state otherwise.

Have you released any album yet?

Yes, I've released one; it is titled "Attitude", and it's in the market presently. It is a 15 track album, produced by T.Y. Mix, and it was launched at the Radio house in September. It's available almost everywhere they sell CDs, but the prominent places are all Silverbird outlets in Lagos, Abuja, Portharcourt, and one or two Redeemed churches around, it does not mean it is a gospel album anyway.

What about the video?

I have only released the *I Am Not Afraid* video, and we shot it here in Abuja, somewhere in Jabi district, and so far the response has been crazy. I went to Lagos last month and seriously the response I got was exciting, I am really grateful to God. A.M express and AIT have been most helpful too; I appreciate their gesture. The second one was shot recently, it is called *Show Some Love*. We shot it with Bomvi; he's the one that shot for Konga. It's not out yet, but I am hoping anytime from now it will be out. When it comes out we'll know how far with it, but the shooting was fun, we shot it at the VIP lounge of Silverbird.

On what label are you signed up?

None. I'm an independent artist. There is something abroad they call INDEE, that is, I do my own stuff, release my own songs, but the album was actually produced by T.Y. Mix, Gospel, and G-link. But label wise, it's zainabSULE label.

Have you done any collabos with any artistes?



In the album, I did a pidgin English stuff with a Portharcourt based artist, T-shake, it is called *Everything Don Cange*. Usually I do not sing in pidgin. I'm hoping that in the singles coming out after the album, I'll work with an artiste who plays the guitar, because we tend to think like artistes that are rock based. So far it's only T-Shake, but T.Y. Mix backed me up in one song in the album, although he is not an artiste.

Is there any particular artiste you will want to collabo with soon?

I would really love to do a collabo with Ginny. I would love to colobo with G.T the guitar man, and I would love to do with Etcetera, all of them sing rock. Those are the ones that come to mind, because we sing the same kind of music.

Apart from guitar, is there any other musical instrument that you can handle?

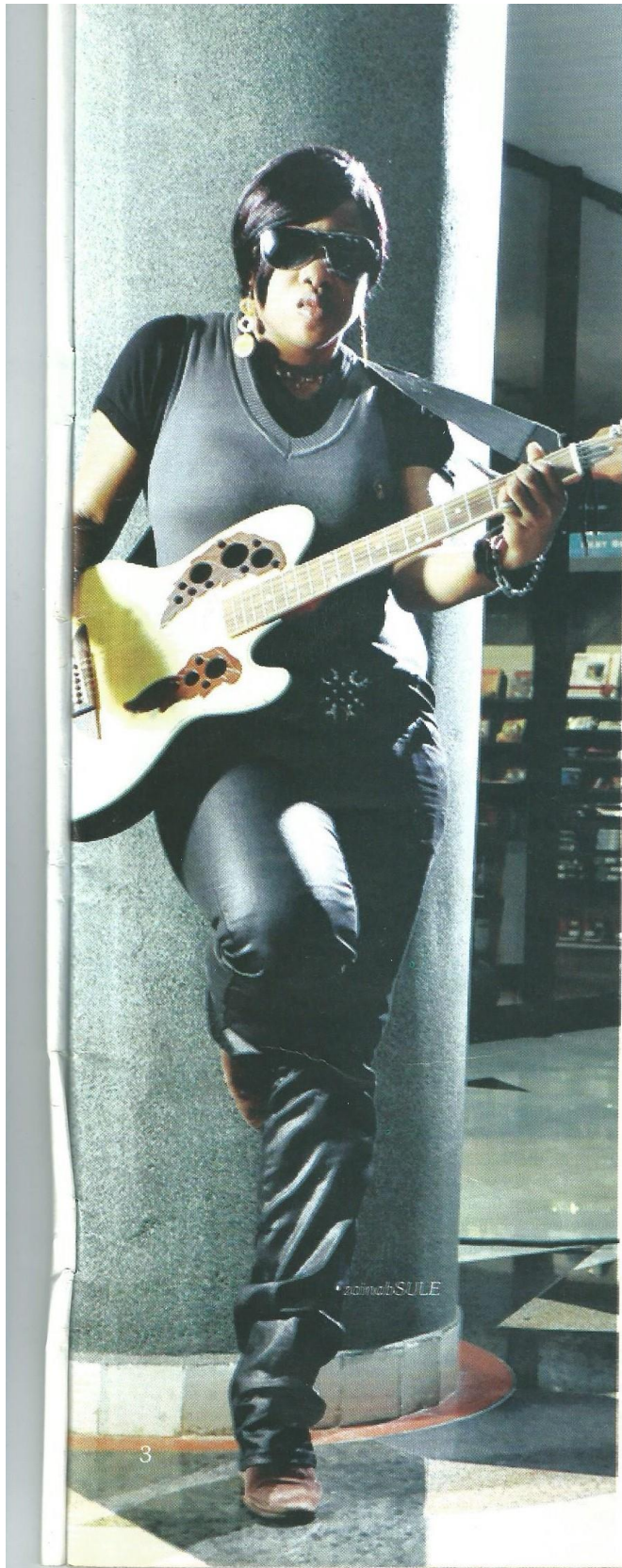
No, I'm ok with my guitar, but maybe in the future, I wouldn't mind playing the violin.

Who are your role models in the industry?

Nigerians should not be angry, but since most of my music upbringing came from Don Williams, Kenny Chesney, Avril Lavigne, Alan Jackson, and so on, so I do not typically have any Nigerian role model. I do not mean to be rude, but it is due to my musical orientation.

You are about to embark on a musical tour of Ghana, would that be your first?

Outside Nigeria, yes, that would be my very first, but I actually started in April, which was in Abuja here. May was supposed to be for Lagos and Ghana, but we shifted that of Lagos to July, because I was advised that the Lagos tour



Arts PEOPLE

should be on its own. It would be when I come back from Ghana, just one week, with some DJs, it is just to see what the response would be like, which is the purpose of the tour, to see the response of people to my music.

Apart from music, what other stuff do you do?

My source of livelihood is actually web designing. I have been a web designer for six years, I started in this very building where we are sitting down (a plaza in Area 11 in Abuja), that's where I got my first job. So, that is what has been funding my music, and I thank God, He's been faithful, I also double as a writer, but the writing aspect is yet to be fully harnessed.

Any award, nomination, or recognition so far?

Not yet, I missed the new life beat musical video award by one day, which was when my video just came outlast year. I am hoping that this year, they will come. But my fans have been giving me all that, recognition and awards.

As an upcoming musician, what challenges do you face?

Every upcoming artiste would have their own peculiar problems, but for me, it's the desire to push forward. Sometimes, you go out and you meet people who look down on you, so you need to be focused, disregard whatever they say against you and move on. So the challenges are external factors, blocks everywhere that you meet as you climb up in the industry, in the level of acceptance. But with God I can do all things.

Abuja artistes have this habit of relocating to Lagos after sometime. What could be the reason for this, and do you see yourself following this trend?

I think the reason for Abuja artist moving to Lagos is the commercial importance of Lagos; it is the commercial nerve center of the nation, which can never be taken away. I was in Lagos last week to promote my album too, and something came out of it. I understand why they are moving, I have tested and tried that, but that is not enough reason for everyone to move to Lagos. Who would hold forte here in Abuja if everyone moved? I do not see myself relocating to Lagos, you do not have to follow the trend to be successful, you can be a success wherever you are, it's a thing of the mind. I do not need to leave Abuja to succeed.

Is there any platform for Abuja artistes, like an association?

I am not aware of any, I would not say there is none, but I do not belong to any association. Everyone does their own thing.

Where do you see zainabSULE in the next 10 years?

In the next 10 years, I am hoping to be more than a musician to people. I would want to be a source of encouragement to other young artistes somewhere somehow, to tell them that they do not have to lower their standards to excel; and more importantly, I want to be among the first ten artistes, who have made great impact in Nigeria.

Most artist tend to coin out a nickname for themselves in the industry, do you see yourself doing this too in



•zainabSULE

the near future or you are still sticking to your name?

zainabSULE is the name my parents gave me, so I do not intend to change it, I feel comfortable with it. Michael Jackson used his name, so why do I have to change mine? Some artistes do not think about when they grow older, by that time those names might be a little childish for them, but there is nothing they can do about that again because it has stuck with them like a second skin. So zainabSULE it is, it is a one word name.

How do you get inspiration to compose and write songs?

It is God, most of time when I am just playing with my guitar, I might not really intend to compose, but a song would just come, that is why I always have my writing materials handy. At other times I might just compose a poem and then I convert it to a song. I don't just wake up and say I want to compose a song, sometimes they come, sometimes they don't.

It is almost impossible to separate music and drugs, what is your take on this?

It's a very big issue. I personally don't do drugs, but as a musician, I've seen it around me, I don't think it's something that should be encouraged. It takes self discipline and the fear of God to abstain from drugs. As much as I would like to say never, I would say I am depending on the grace of God. I see people do it around, I understand the pressure, but I pray I don't join the league.

What would you say your greatest moment is so far?

The greatest moment of any artist is when you play and people are inspired and they appreciate your work. My greatest moment is being on A.M express without knowing anybody there at NTA; somebody just called me and said how would you love to be part of the show, to me it's encouraging. The second was when I was playing at the Abuja Writers Forum, and one highly placed lady walked up to me and said, "Zainab you are one of the best female artistes I have listened to".

Any last word for your fans?

Watch out for zainabSULE



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