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## **Gospel to Soul, singer Dione Taylor brings her music to two festivals in Waterloo Region**

Waterloo Region Record

By **Valerie Hill**

WATERLOO — Smooth and soothing, raspy and full bodied, Canadian singer/songwriter/pianist, Dione Taylor, loves exploring what her remarkable voice can do and it seems the surprises never stop.

"I'm feeling I have more to this voice, there are new things I can do with it," said the affable Taylor who performs at both the Uptown Waterloo Jazz Festival, July 15 to 17 and the Kitchener Blues Festival, Aug. 4 to 7. She was pleasantly surprised to be invited to perform at the Blues Festival.

"Most people know me as a jazz singer, but I don't like to put music in a box," said the Toronto-based performer. "I'm really happy to broaden my audience."

To the Regina-born singer, music is about performing from the soul, whether it's jazz or gospel or anything in between. Both performances will have their own flavour but Taylor said most of her set will be music from her 2015 album "Born Free."

"Born Free" is a representation of my truth, what's going on in the world today," said the singer who has a spiritual side to her music.

The people she meets are her inspiration and she wants the music to soothe what has become a deeply troubled world, filled with violence.

"Born Free" is my message to the world, my love message," she said.

Taylor's spiritual nature is a product of her upbringing as a pastor's daughter in a family where everyone, on both sides, are musical and represent 200 years of black spiritual music.

By age 10 she was music director and organist at her father's church, Shiloh Assembly Church in Regina, where both her brothers minister the music and youth program. With so much music in her background, it wasn't surprising that her mother had a special request when Taylor decided to pursue music as a profession.

"Mom said 'I hope you do a gospel album one day,'" she said. "I was thinking 'Old Rugged Cross' and I wasn't really feeling that."

But opening her mind to the possibilities of gospel, Taylor discovered she didn't need

to be restricted to the old style of the genre.

"There's a wealth of music in me," she said.

Spending time in Nashville and Memphis helped.

"There's a beautiful sense of community with the music," she said. "There's music on every street corner, rootsy music. It's completely inspiring and reminded me of the music I heard growing up."

There is no artifice about Taylor, she says and she sings what she feels and that openness has garnered considerable praise.

After leaving Regina, Taylor entered the Humber College jazz program in Toronto, and was awarded the college's Thomas Kehoe Memorial Award for Outstanding Vocal Performance upon graduation in 2003.

In 2004 she performed at the White House for Black Music Month and a year later, she was singing for Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh. In 2008 Taylor was nominated for a Gemini Award for her rendition of Oscar Peterson's "Hymn to Freedom" performed with Oliver Jones at the Canadian Songwriters Hall of Fame Gala.

In 2009 Taylor was granted a mentorship with acclaimed jazz pianist, Oliver Jones through the Governor General's Performing Arts Award Mentorship Program. For a young singer, working with a musician of Jones' calibre was life altering.

"I got to talk and play music with him," she said. "It was me, learning from him, advice on music and life."

Taylor and her band Backsliderz are presently on tour and will appear in Toronto, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Quebec and Port Hope as well Kitchener and Waterloo. She loves the vibes given off by festival crowds.

"We get to meet so many people," she enthused. "The crowds are so enthusiastic. I love that we can bring music to them."

Taylor performs with her band at the Uptown Waterloo Jazz Festival, Friday, July 15, 5:30 to 6:30 p.m.