

Songstress Alma Horton got her "lady" moniker from her elegance and fierce independence.



STYLING: JESSICA BROWN; HAIR: JESSICA BROWN; MAKEUP: JESSICA BROWN; GROOMING: JESSICA BROWN; JEWELRY: JESSICA BROWN; SHIRT: JESSICA BROWN; JACKET: JESSICA BROWN; BELT: JESSICA BROWN; NECKLACE: JESSICA BROWN; SHOES: JESSICA BROWN

PHOTO BY PAUL PUGLIESE

## LADY OF THE DAY

Alma Horton is a force in the Philly soul scene.

Black Lily, the weekly jam session in Old City started by hip-hop band The Roots, has spawned many of the brightest neo-soul talents of this generation including Jill Scott, Jaguar Wright, Jazzyfatnastees and Kindred. Continuing in this tradition is Lady Alma, who just happens to be Wright's second cousin.

Born in San Diego and raised in Philly, singer and songwriter Alma Horton plays piano and has a five-octave vocal range. Her mother donned her with the moniker "lady" because of her elegance and fierce independence. Horton's live act serves as a telling example of the power of naming. In concert, she remains poised yet brims with pure, gritty, intense emotion. When she sings, it's as if you're in church and at the club at the same time, and you don't know whether to twist your hips or cry for mercy.

Horton's inspirations are varied, but she thanks God for her friends because their problems give her "awesome material." Her songs draw on life experiences to which everyone can relate, from the joyous "House Party" and the romantically frustrating "Stop Wasting Time" to the liberating "Be Free." Backed by her band—an impressive all-male troupe of players—Lady Alma's live act is an homage to American music. The ensemble effortlessly flows from house to gospel and on to R&B, acid jazz and what she calls "alternative soul."

Horton began singing at age 3 in a church choir and later trained at a few of the city's venerable performance institutions, including Freedom Theatre and the Settlement Music School. She didn't consider singing professionally until producer and DJ King Britt heard her at Silk City in Northern Liberties nearly seven years ago and invited her to join his Sylik 130 Collective. Lady Alma was the feature vocalist on the title track, "When the Funk Hits the Fan," and the lead single, "Last Night a DJ Saved My Life," on Sylik 130's debut album in 1998. She has since independently released an EP and recorded with local spoken-word artist Ursula Rucker, hip-hop group The Spooks, blues crooner G-Love and London-based producing duo 4Hero. When she's not touring Canada, Japan, England, the Netherlands and cities across the United States—especially Atlanta and Washington, D.C., where she has large fan bases—Horton is working her gift as best she can locally, performing consistently sold-out shows at Black Lily and North by Northwest in Mount Airy.

Horton says she is happiest on stage because it "feels like sitting at home," but in the future she also hopes to market other artists and establish an arts center for urban youth, similar to those she used to visit. "Being independent gives me the freedom to do what I want to do," she says. And with the impressive career she's been building thus far, maybe she doesn't need support from the major record labels, at least not right away. When she releases her full-length album later this year, they'll come knocking on her door. —*Mooré Karmel Holmes*