

Sophie's Wilderness

Sophie B. Hawkins talks candidly about '*pawn power*', being an independent artist, and life after Sony in a new interview available now at her underground website.

Hawkins' relationship with her record label Columbia Records and its parent company Sony Music became strained after internal politics delayed the release of her third album, 'Timbre.' Columbia reportedly disapproved of the use of a Banjo on one track, "Lose Your Way," and went about remixing the track to instead incorporate a guitar. The result being something Hawkins has likened to 'muzak'.

An interesting combination of fan and legal intervention resulted in Hawkins parting ways with her label while retaining the masters to 'Timbre'. Though Hawkins concedes it was a nerve wracking experience.

"I was ready to leave my career by the way, I didn't leave thinking I had a great independent world ahead of me," she admits. "I left thinking the business was going to blackhall me or whatever, because I left thinking everyone was gonna say 'she's just a crazy nut and how could she leave Sony Music?' Well that isn't what happened, I was lucky - but I took the risk. I had no evidence that I was going to survive this as an artist, but I took the risk and I did survive."

Despite the difficulties she experienced, Hawkins expresses a surprisingly deep gratitude for her former record company and seems relieved that the conflict between the pair has been resolved.



Photograph: John Lacey

"I feel as completely forgiven on both sides you know, that anything that could've been tense is not tense any more. I feel we communicate love and respect towards one another - that's a fact."

So any advice for the aspiring musician? With so many musicians wanting to release their material and the finite resources of record companies, supply invariably outweighs demand in these situations. Hawkins comments on how the pressure for musicians to get their music heard, a pressure she intimately relates with, can detrimentally effect an artist's income and their bargaining power.

Hawkins also muses about something termed '*pawn power*' - the idea that even the seemingly most insignificant possesses power if they only take the action to properly yield it.

"The industry is the industry and it will never favour the artist, and the artist(s) have to realise that - we're just pawns in the game of making money. Ok that's not a bad thing, infact it can be a great thing, you just have to learn how to use your '*pawn power*.'"

Her power apparently coming in the form of her departure from Columbia Records/Sony Music and by funding her own album, the yet to be released '*Wilderness*'.

Hawkins also reflects on the evolution of her songs, being hired (and then fired) by Bryan Ferry, and why she believes her music shines on radio. The interview is available in three parts at the Sophie B. Hawkins Underground website.

'Wilderness' is expected to be released January 2004.