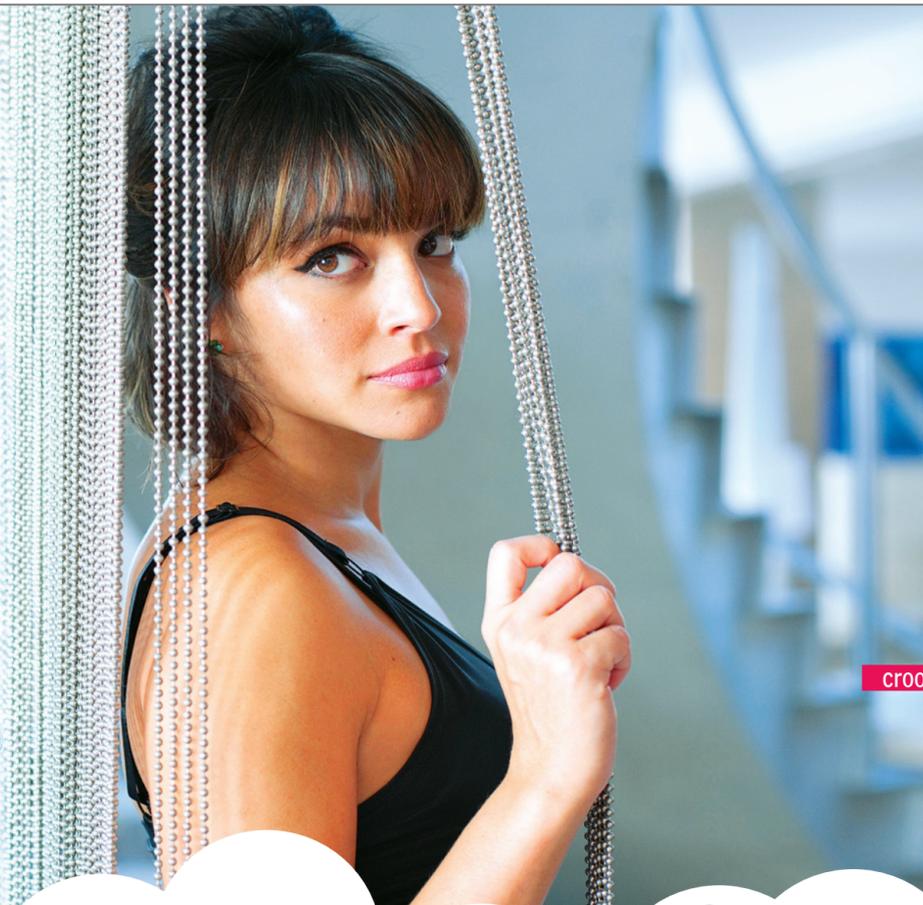


faces

Large cover story



Keeping up with Jones

As Norah Jones gets ready for her Indian debut, we find out more about the person behind the sultry voice. By Shefali Rao

It's not every day that a 22-year-old hits as high a note with her debut album as to have over ten million copies of it sold in the US alone. It's even rarer when the tracks are predominantly jazz-based, a niche genre pitted against the pop-rock that her contemporaries are dishing out. And this is precisely what Norah Jones did with *Come Away With Me* (2002). Eleven years, nine Grammy Awards and five albums later, Norah Jones, now 33, has managed to hold her place in a fickle industry, and how. The husky singer, whose voice transports you almost to another era, is known for many things — being the late sitar maestro Ravi Shankar's daughter and musician Anoushka Shankar's half-sister are only two of them. But above all, it is the lilting voice that stands apart and the dreamy quality she brings to her sound, weaving together elements of folk, country, soul and contemporary jazz. Ahead of her first ever concert tour in India, a trip that, unfortunately, comes shortly after the death of her father, Jones opens up about heartbreak, Neil Young and why her time in India will be a bittersweet experience.

“

I thought it (India tour) would be nice for him, and nice for me. It's very sad that he's (Ravi Shankar) gone now, but I know he was very excited that I was going to be playing in India, so that's a nice thing.



crooner

With Brian 'Danger Mouse' Burton
Pic: Noah Abrams

Jazzing it up

Jones grew up on a diet of classic favourites, including jazz greats Billie Holiday, Ray Charles and Etta James. Incidentally, her first actual gig was at a coffee shop in Dallas on her 16th birthday, where she performed *I'll Be Seeing You*, a song that Holiday made famous. But at the forefront of them all, is iconic Canadian singer Neil Young. "Neil Young is one of my favourite artistes and definitely someone I play at home more than everyone else. This has been going on for about six to seven years, and I'm not sure it's ever going to stop," says the singer, who has admitted to crying each time she sees him perform live. "I love him so much. Something about his music just goes straight to your heart, even if he's rocking out. I love the country side of Neil, I love the rock side of Neil, I love the quiet side of Neil. He's kind of a heavy metal God in a way, as well," she tells us. Otherwise, a track "just has to be something (she) likes listening to." Alternative rock tops the list. "Lately, we've been listening to a lot of Grateful Dead at home along with Dr Dog," she adds.

Heartbreak hotel

Don't Know Why talks of lost love, *Cry Me A River* paints a vivid picture of a relationship gone sour and *Don't Miss You At All* sees Jones wondering who she is without the "warm touch" of her lover's hand. Heartbreak as a theme seems to reverberate in almost all of Jones' compelling tracks. On the connection it shares with great music and the challenge it poses, she says, "I wasn't too challenged by it. It's pretty easy to write what you feel, jazz it up and make it more dramatic than it really is. That's kind of easy, and it's certainly a relatable topic, you know." Clearly, millions of fans worldwide relate to it. But with this popularity comes a flood of criticism from people who feel she is too



M Ward

"plain" and "downtempo" — one critic even called her "nice, but not necessary." But with the same self-assurance that figures in her music, Jones' rebuttal is simple — "They just don't get it."

Spinning stories

Jones' fifth studio album, *Little Broken Hearts* (2012), came after a three-year hiatus post her previous album, *The Fall*. While it does centre around heartbreak, a few twists have caused some critics to refer to it as her boldest departure. *Miriam* sees her feathery voice plotting the murder of a woman who steals her lover, while *Happy Pills* is upbeat and sensual all at once.

On whether *Little Broken Hearts* is autobiographical, Jones confesses, "Everything is autobiographical to a point, but some things are less autobiographical and more storytelling. *Miriam* is the perfect example of that." And what was going through her head when she wrote that song? "Well, all kinds of things. Nobody does stuff like that in real life, so you just take things that you experience, or see other people go through especially and you make a story out of it," she replies.

The danger zone

Little Broken Hearts was born of a collaboration between Jones and Brian Joseph Burton, popularly known by his stage name, Danger Mouse. The album has been referred to as her 'comeback', for its eclectic nature. The breezy songs have a pulse that Jones seems to have discovered with Burton, a producer who has worked with names like Gnarl Barkley, The Black Keys and Gorillaz. The whole experience is something she treasures. "It took about two months and was a really true collaboration. I put myself out in his world, in LA and his studio and I really was excited to work with him and his sounds. We became very good friends and so it was nice to work with someone who could bring me out of anything I was used to, in a very comfortable, natural, collaborative way," she says, adding, "it was the best of both worlds — playing with my friends but also doing something completely different but not scary because we're buddies. So that was really nice."

Journey to India

Being the late Ravi Shankar's daughter has had its advantages — that music is in her blood counts for a lot — but it's come with its pitfalls. While Jones has always been private about her father, there has been enough speculation on it. In 2003, the late actor Dev Anand wanted to make a film on what several people perceive to be their "tortured relationship", a fact she resented. She issued a statement saying he (Anand) "had no idea of their story". So is her first tour to India, viewed with mixed emotions? "I'm excited to come. It's also bittersweet because my Dad just passed away. I've never played in India, and my Dad always wanted me to play there. It's just been a matter of timing, and adding on to tours. It just never worked out in the past. I'm usually so tired by the end of a tour that I never want to add far away places because I get exhausted," she explains. "This time, I planned it a while ago, my Dad asked me to do it, and I thought it would be nice for him, and nice for me. It's very sad that he's gone now, but he was very excited that I was going to be playing in India, so that's a good thing," says the songstress.

The big screen

Jones has also had her fair share of screen time. The singer has made cameo appearances in films like *Two Weeks Notice* (2002) and more recently, *Ted* (2012). However, it was Wong Kar-Wai's 2007 critically acclaimed romance-drama, *My Blueberry Nights*, which saw her debut in a lead role, opposite Jude Law. For now, though, Jones has no intention of pursuing acting seriously. "I don't know. I would love to do more in the future if something fun came up. It's a right place at the right time kind of thing. If I have time, and it seems fun, I'm down, but I have no idea," she says.

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Pics: Frank W Ockenfels

At a glance

- Born Geethali Norah Jones Shankar, she changed her name officially to Norah Jones at 16, with the consent of parents Ravi Shankar and Sue Jones
- Born in New York and brought up in Texas
- Her first album remains the highest selling to date — *Come Away With Me* attained Diamond status, selling over 20 million copies worldwide. The Diamond club includes music giants like Metallica and Led Zeppelin
- Has made appearances on a host of shows, from *30 Rock* to *Sesame Street*

Round trip

Jones will kick off her India tour at A Summer's Day, artiste management company Only Much Louder's first ever festival in Mumbai. The one-day festival, which will take place on March 3 at Turf Club, will feature two stages — the Main Stage (where Jones will be the headlining act) and the Think Pink Stage, in partnership with the Women's Cancer Initiative — Tata Memorial Hospital. A Summer's Day, is after all, a festival that aims to be a relaxed affair that women can head to.

Post Mumbai, Jones will make a pitstop in Delhi for performances at Siri Fort Auditorium on March 5 and 6. And finally, Bangalore will play host to the songstress, where you can catch her at NICE Grounds on March 8.

7 pm. At Tumkur Road. Tickets (₹2,500, ₹6,000) available on bookmyshow.com

Twice as good

During her Indian tour, fans won't be treated to just Jones' signature sound by itself. Singer-songwriter-guitarist Matthew Stephen Ward, known best as M Ward, will be performing with her. Ward, who is most famous for being one half of indie duo She & Him, along with actor-singer Zoëy Deschanel, will share the stage with Jones, something she is clearly thrilled about.

"Oh, I'm so excited he's coming with me on this tour. We haven't toured together in many years — we have a lot of love for the similar kind of music," she enthuses. And Ward more than complements her sound — "I think we go well together as a double act, you know. He's such a great guitar player and he kind of sings like an old crooner but there's something very new about his music as well. I'm just a big fan and he's a good friend, so I'm excited that we'll get to tour together again," she enthuses.

