



Franklin says she came up with the title track to her new album, *So Damn Happy*, after she reminisced about an old relationship which she now looks back on with fond memories.

# Aretha Franklin

## Returns With Soulful CD, 'So Damn Happy'

The Queen is on and she is "so damn happy."

Yes, the Queen of Soul Aretha Franklin is on and is happier than ever these days.

During a recent interview with JET, Queen Aretha chatted about her sizzling concert tour, *The Queen Is On*, her new hit album, *So Damn Happy*, and revealed why she really

is so damn happy—on and off stage.

Aretha's tour was originally called "Aretha Sings Her Musical History," but she changed it to "The Queen is On."

"I named it that because I just decided that I was going to get into super, excellent shape, physically, vocally, everything. You know how it is when you are watching a basketball player or somebody like that and you say, 'Oh, Isiah is on tonight,' when they are really hot. So it is the equivalent of that."

The tour is indeed hot and has been selling out in every city, including Atlanta, Washington, D.C., Chicago's Ravinia Music Festival and the Queen's hometown of Detroit.

"The tour is going absolutely, smashingly well. It started off a little rough because we were doing outdoor venues and it was kind of cold out there, so it was affecting my voice, particularly in Washington and Portsmouth, Virginia. We were outside and it was really kind of cold. We had our coats on and we were still cold. But anyway, we turned the corner and since we turned the corner, we haven't looked back. We turned the corner into far better weather, much warmer and more beautiful, especially in Atlanta where we had a whooping good time," she exclaims.

She sings all of the soul classics that have made her a music treasure. She always aims to please her fans. Before she sings *You Make Me Feel Like A Natural Woman*, she tells the crowd, "I know you won't forgive me

if I don't sing this next song."

She certainly keeps her fans satisfied with her renditions of her other soul classics including *Respect*, *Chain of Fools*, *Think*, and *Bridge Over Troubled Waters*. She also performs jazz tunes and pop standards that she recorded in the early '60s before she became the Queen of Soul. She generally opens her show with the standard, *It Won't Be Long*. "It was the very first song I ever recorded," she reveals. "I particularly want and am presenting the scope of my repertoire from the early '60s through today. I am just trying to select and pick songs from each period."

She wants to make sure her fans know that this is not her last tour. "Please make this clear, will you?" she asks JET. "This is just a semi-retirement tour. I am only cutting back on the number of dates that I will be doing yearly. I'm going to always be singing. Singing is definitely my thing, but I am just cutting back on the number of dates now."

Not only is she happy with her tour, she is thrilled with her new album—her first since 1998's smash *A Rose Is Still A Rose*. "I am happy about the album. I haven't recorded in a few years, haven't had a release in a few years, so I am really happy that it is out now. It's the kind of album that you can just sit back, kick back and enjoy all of it. From cut to cut, it's a groove. It's more reminiscent of the things that I did in the early '60s and '70s, only contemporary. But it is more like, in terms of



During her hot tour, *The Queen Is On*, Franklin definitely was on in her hometown of Detroit at the Freedom Hill Amphitheatre where the Queen of Soul was royally introduced by radio personality Tom Joyner.



the depth of the melody, like *Ain't No Way* and *Angel* and things like that. I think that it is more of what people would like to hear from me. As my nephew says, 'it's off the hook.'

The title track *So Damn Happy* is one of several songs that the Queen wrote and produced. The song is about an old relationship that makes her so damn happy when she thinks about it. "I was just reminiscing one day. You know, how you are just sitting around not doing a lot and you reminisce about one of the old flames. It was such a great relationship, the moments that we had were so good. I just got happy all over again," she says

with a big laugh. "I was so damn happy for the moment. It was such a fabulous relationship. Yeah, we just grooved together so good," she reminisces.

She reveals the song is about a relationship she once had, but the Queen does not want to divulge any



▲ Winner of a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 1994, Franklin says her new album is reminiscent of the hit music she did in the early '60s and '70s. Fans who catch her tour are treated to renditions of her soul classics as well as jazz and pop tunes.

details. "We don't want to talk about that," she says with a little laugh. "We don't want to talk about that," she teasingly laughs again. "Just an old flame."

She reveals that a current romance is making her happier than ever. She won't reveal his identity but allows: "There's a man in my life who is making me so damn happy. You can say that. He absolutely does that, makes me so damn happy. Yes, he does, absolutely does."

Other must-listen-to tracks on the album include the current hit single, *The Only Thing Missin'*; *Holdin' On* and *No Matter What* both featuring, Mary J. Blige, who also co-wrote the tunes along with Troy Taylor. "Mary J. and Troy Taylor are superwriters together and I really enjoy working

with both of them. Mary J's music is so earthy and real. I like the earthiness in which she writes. And Troy Taylor is just so good, it is ridiculous. I love everything and anything he writes. He's really classic," she enthuses.

The tune *Good News* she notes is a tribute to her gospel roots. "This song speaks of the good news, and that is His birth, His life, and His resurrection. The good news of course, is the gospel as well."

Another gem is the Burt Bacharach-produced tune, *Falling Out of Love*. "I think he has a top 10 record there, I really do," she raves. "He's still writing great songs. Bacharach's melodies are so memorable, and sometimes haunting, just his whole approach to the music. He's unlike most other producers and

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► A proud mother, her son Teddy plays guitar in her band and tours with Franklin. She's also boosting the music careers of her son, Kecal, a hip-hop performer and producer, and Eddie, a singer, who'll be recording on his mother's label.



writers. He's going to do something that you are going to remember, and it will probably become among your favorites. All of Bacharach stuff I love—I Say A Little Prayer, Do You Know The Way To San Jose. Dionne (Warwick) did a fabulous job with everything Bacharach wrote.”

She says she is also happy that she is able to boost the music careers of her sons, Kecal, Eddie and Teddy, who plays guitar in her band and tours with her. “I am happy that I will be working with my sons. Kecal has been producing and he's making some tracks. So I am going to sing a couple of his things. And Eddie is going to be recording soon and I will record him on my own label. I am just really more into just helping them now, helping them develop their thing. Teddy is still playing guitar with me and he also goes on the road with his own band. I am happy about a lot of things, but I am most happy with my children and that they are doing well. They are doing well, and that makes me most happy.”

She adds, “I can kind of help my sons out, invest some time with them

with respect to their product, what it is that they are trying to do. We've been doing a lot of talking, so now it is time to put it in action,” she declares.

The Queen reveals that she is damn happy with the progress she's making with her weight. “I don't smoke. I stopped smoking in 1992 and I'm just now gaining some real control over my weight. I am working out with a trainer who has been coming out to different places. We usually meet after my concerts; on my off days on the road, we work out.”

She reveals the weight gain began when she stopped smoking. “There's no question about it. I ballooned, like 40 going north. No question about it,” she laughs. “But I'd rather deal with



▲ Fans noticed a slimmer Aretha Franklin, when she recently performed the national anthem during the NFL season kick-off in Washington, D.C. Franklin says she's working out with a trainer and is happy with the progress she's making with her weight loss.

the weight and getting it off the natural way than have a health problem behind the cigarettes.”

The Queen states emphatically: “I can be pleasingly plump if need be until I can work it off. Or as my friend says, ‘I can be a plump cutie,’ she laughs. “I can be a plump cutie until I can work it off,” she laughs again. “Everybody

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doesn't like thin girls. I'm with Mo'Nique. Mo'Nique knows what she's talking about,” referring to the comedienne's popular jokes about slim women and overweight women.

Always looking for new challenging ventures, she will soon open her own booking agency, Crown Booking Agency, in Detroit. “Mainly, I will be booking myself, services of Aretha. But there will be two or three artists who I will help along the way. For example, if you are interested in booking Eddie, call the Crown Booking Agency.”

She is also working on a concert souvenir book of her career for her fans as well as a party book. “The party book is going to be recipes, before-and-after pictures, and little anecdotes that I will tell, dishing a little bit with the girls, photographs of some of my soirées; it will also have a ‘how to give a successful party’ section.”

She reveals what makes a good party. “The music, food and the people are the three main ingredients in my book.”

Reflecting on her career that spans more than four decades, she shares the secret to her long career: “Great fans. I don't allow anybody to mess with my fans, and that means security people or anybody. And just being very selective in terms of the music, handpicking everything and not just letting somebody lay what they want you to have on you. And I am a very progressive woman. I am very contemporary. I stay current.”

—CLARENCE WALDRON