

## FROM HOMELESSNESS TO HONORS – ANDY STOKES AND THE GIFT THAT WOULD

### NOT BE DENIED

Andy Stokes has a gift. Some call it a talent. It has been a blessing. It has been a curse. He has run with it. He has run to it. He has run from it. No matter what he did to thwart it, the gift would not be denied.

Andy's gift is to give unconditional love through music—it is his purpose. His voice, at times raspy, at times silky smooth, is a unique harmonic blend that strikes an emotional response in all who have an opportunity to hear it. He has been called the 'pied-piper of soul'. You just want more of it.

Andy's career is exploding. But this is no overnight success. He has been at this junction three times over his 30 year musical career.

The first time was in the 80's with the legendary funk band Cool'R. Cool'R was made up of ex-members of the band Pleasure and shot to notoriety throughout the northwest with a funky R&B sound, and Andy's voice at the helm. Cool'R signed with A&M Records and eventually ended up with Lou Adler's label Ode. After touring the world, internal issues with the band members led to the group splitting up in 1991. Andy returned to Portland, got a regular job and got on with life. As Andy puts it "I absolutely did not want ANYTHING to do with music. I just wanted a normal life". Friends and fans had other ideas. After nearly coming to blows with his best friend, he agreed to one show. "I was sure no one would show up. It was an hour before the doors opened and I was doing a sound check when a buddy told me to look outside. There was a line up around the block. It was emotional, brought me to tears. Wow." Andy continued his day job but began playing



clubs and venues around the Portland area. It wasn't long before the record labels came calling again.

In 1996 Warner Bros Music Group (WMG) moved Andy to Los Angeles and set him up with the legendary producer Kashif. Andy and Kashif produced a stellar album. Andy, still under contract, was living the life in LA, getting ready for the release. But WMG had other ideas. Internal struggles with the company led them to unceremoniously drop a significant number of their artists – Andy was one of them. "A week had passed and I hadn't heard from anyone. It didn't occur to me that there might be an issue. I just happened to call Kashif to hang out. He said "you haven't heard have you?" – that's how I found out. No one from WMG called to tell me. It was a shock." Within a week Andy



had to move out of the 'company' apartment, lost his income, and his recordings. "I was literally out on the streets of LA with my backpack and no way to get back to Portland. Not even bus fare home! I didn't have very good coping skills back then. I really didn't know what to do."

A friend offered him a couch until he could figure something out, and he turned to what he knew – singing for his supper. For six months he played as many gigs as he could just to make a living. "It was hard. I was just so devastated and overwhelmed but I had to keep moving. My friend, Bill Beckman. Man, I don't know what would have happened if he hadn't been there for me. Not only did he take me into his home, but he helped me make some contacts so I could get some gigs."

Andy finally returned to the Northwest, once again, determined to leave music behind. But it is his gift and it would not be denied.

"I moved from friend to friend for a while until I found a job that paid enough for me to get my own place. That was all I wanted. A normal life." And he did it. For a while. But, the disappointment of his LA experience weighed heavy, the economy was down and he was laid

off from job after job, and his marriage fell apart. "I was struggling. Food was my comfort. I would literally eat myself to sleep, but I had to keep pushing. There wasn't an option." What was left? That gift. He once again turned to music.

He began building a following and re-establishing himself as a music icon throughout the Northwest and beyond. His reputation for high energy, thoroughly entertaining and musically dazzling shows spread. Fans flocked to Andy's shows. It was during this time Andy earned the moniker the 'Northwest King of Soul Music'. He was working hard, doing what he loved, making money, moving forward. Life was good.

What happened next was not what Andy expected. "I had just come home from touring in Las Vegas and the bank called me." Identity theft had wiped out everything he had-- everything. The ID theft was the beginning of a spiral that left him homeless for the second time in his life.

Over the next eight years he battled. "I just had to survive. I was blessed to have friends who would take me in. I was doubly blessed to have a voice people wanted to listen to." During that

eight years, he lost his Father and was floored by the sudden passing of his best friend (NBA player Jerome Kersey). “Those years are a blur to me now. I was just heads down, doing what I needed to do to get through the day. But at night, after a gig – I would eat myself into a coma – just so I didn’t think about it...” His weight ballooned and his health suffered, but Andy Stokes would not be broken, and his gift would still not be denied.

After the death of his Father he knew he had to save his own life. “Before he died, he had pulled me aside and told me I needed to get the weight off of me and get my life together. It was the catalyst I needed. I went to the beach, stood in the water and asked for help. Help in letting go of the past, in moving past my grief, and in allowing myself to be open to a new future.” From that moment things have been different for Andy Stokes. Not over night. But steadily, since 2013, Andy has been on an amazing upward trajectory.

Here it is 2019 and Andy Stokes is once again on the precipice of world-wide musical success. His gift has saved his life: he is over 100lbs lighter, healthy and married to the love of his life. After forming his own record label, his song ‘Best Day Ever’ was released January 29th 2018 and debuted on Billboard and MediaBase R&B charts in the top 30 on its way up into the top 10. The song, inspired by his wife, held the number one spot on the Official Indie Soul Charts for three consecutive weeks and was

named the #1 independent soul record of the year, was in the SiriusXM platinum picks, held the #1 spot for R&B/Soul on Music Choice, reached #2 on the Amazon.com contemporary R&B bestseller list, and raced up charts all over the globe. Billboard named ‘Best Day Ever’ one of the top 50 A-R&B songs for 2018. Thirty weeks later, ‘Best Day Ever’ was still on Billboard charts (recurring) and it continues to be heard on radio and streaming services across the country, breaking records for a northwest artist and doing what only a handful of independent artists have been able to do. That gift, it would not be denied.

The now two-time inductee into the Oregon Music Hall of Fame, and his Label, then released the next single off of his EP ‘Now’. This time, a collaboration with the ubiquitous Snoop Dogg and super-producer DJ Battlecat. ‘We On Da Flo’ continued the journey for this talented and inspirational singer. An upbeat, feel-good, Northwest vibe with a touch of g-funk, ‘We On Da Flo’ broke more ground and garnered Andy Stokes the recognition from fans and music insiders he deserves.

With a new single ready to release in the summer of 2019, Andy Stokes is now about to see his star rise even higher.

“When I look out from the stage and see the smiles on people’s faces, see them bobbing their heads, tapping their feet – I know, this is exactly where I am meant to be.”

