

JAKI GRAHAM | BIOGRAPHY

Jaki Graham is a unique entertainer - her down-to-earth approach to life and compassion for others, combined with a powerful and inspirational voice and visual impact on stage, have made her one of the most appealing and enduring Soul entertainers to emerge from the UK.

Jaki made her singing debut at the school's Christmas talent contest with Michael Jackson's Ben and won with a clear victory. From then on, it was only a matter of time before she would sign her first record deal.

The first band she joined was *One Night Affair* at the age of 17, followed by the *SRO Band* and then *Ferrari*. One day, Jaki recorded a session for a jazz funk group called *Medium Wave Band* and it is from this that she was spotted by talent scout, Brian Freshwater and signed with EMI in 1983. It took EMI to channel her image and style into the correct direction, to form the soul seductress she is today. Her single entitled ***What's the Name of Your Game?*** gave Jaki her first TV appearance on the children's TV programme *Crackerjack*. ***Heaven Knows*** became the title track of her debut album.

Could it Be I'm Falling In Love? marked a significant collaboration in Jaki's career, and is one song that remains a timeless 80's classic. Reaching No.5 in the British charts in March '85, her second and last hit duet entitled ***Mated*** again received wide critical acclaim. Radio 1 presenters obviously loved her, as this song never stopped playing on the radio airwaves at that time. ***Round and Around*** was long overdue, as this was Jaki's first successful solo hit and reached No.9 in June '85. When Jaki was finally given the opportunity to take centre stage, there were no holds barred, as her powerful voice, positive energy and radiance were injected in every one of her performances that people couldn't help but enjoy.





Unlike so many of her 80's contemporaries, Jaki's hits have remained fresh, uncomplicated and modern. ***Set Me Free*** remains an ageless pop classic to this day after rocketing to No.7 in the British charts in May '86, an anthem of that era. ***Breaking Away*** followed and offered her first location shoot abroad. It also charted at a respectable No.14 in August '86. ***Step Right Up*** brought Jaki back to her trademark high energy, up tempo pop hits and gave her yet another Top 20 hit in November '86.

Her third album with EMI, ***From Now On*** was produced in 1987. One track entitled ***The Better Part of Me*** was an exceptionally beautiful ballad, with many in the entertainment business convinced that this was Jaki's first No.1, guaranteed! However, surprisingly the changing climate of EMI dictated some often incredibly ill thought out ideas and both the video and album were shelved after three weeks. This decision coincided with Jaki achieving a *Guinness World Record* for being the first black British female solo artist to have 6 consecutive Top 10 / 20 hits, unheard of by a black British female at that time.

In the same year, *Michael McDonald* came into Jaki's life looking for a female singer to accompany him on the track '*On My Own*' for his UK Tour. Michael, who has worked with some of the most influential names in showbiz including *Patti Labelle* and *Aretha Franklin*, personally chose Jaki over a stream of other UK female vocalists. After hearing her voice, he was quoted as saying that Jaki was '*one of the best singers Britain has ever produced*'. A deep friendship and mutual respect grew between the two artists and to this day, Michael's first choice for a UK singing partner remains Jaki.

Towards the end of the 80's, sales and figures provided by Billboard magazine had established Jaki as Britain's most successful black female artist ever. Not surprisingly, Jaki's success was not limited to the shores of the United Kingdom. People of every culture and language from every corner of the globe loved her natural vocal perfection. The distinct, powerful delivery, coupled with her warm and compassionate ease seemed to melt the barriers of language, colour and creed. Denmark, Germany, Japan, Australia, South Africa - places she had only ever dreamed of visiting - loved her and her fan base grew worldwide.



This marked a turning point and in Japan, Jaki was particularly successful and released albums and singles there that England never even knew existed. Her first album ***Real Life*** sold more than 800,000 copies in less than four weeks. By today's standards, this record is only surpassed by the elite few. Furthermore, tickets for her Japanese tour sold out in 20 minutes flat, outselling some of her well known US contemporaries. In true down to earth style, her reaction was simply, 'For real?' ***Real Life*** gave Jaki many international hit singles and elevated her status further. ***Ain't Nobody*** did exceptionally well in the United States reaching **No.1** in the *Billboard* dance charts for 5 weeks, with its impressive video also rocketing to the *Top 5* in the *American Black Entertainment Charts (BET)*. In retrospect, it is a pity that England never had the chance to hear Jaki's work at the time as it showed growth, professionalism and a polished depth not heard from Jaki before. In fact, it represents some of her best work (and at the same time least known to UK fans). This album, along with those that followed however, are now available on digital release in the UK, USA and Canada.

Ain't Nobody, ***Absolute E-Sensual***, ***Real Life*** and ***You Can Count On Me*** are outstanding tracks which were released in 1994. Jaki had effortlessly slipped into the 90's era of music and as a result, won over a new legion of eager fans worldwide. Sales of ***Ain't Nobody*** reached gold in Australia, Japan and the USA and her next album ***Best Shots*** released only in Japan, responded

1984

Heaven knows



1984

Whats the name of your game



1985

Round and around



1985

Mated



quickly to her popularity with a greatest hits album. Michael McDonald also contributed album tracks specifically for Jaki, with ***Through Your Eyes*** in particular being a classic that still stands the test of time. When Jaki appeared on a German TV show with *Boy George*, he summed her up completely saying 'You'll never meet a harder working artist than Jaki Graham'.

In '95, Jaki released her next Japanese CD entitled ***Rhythm of Life***, followed by ***My Life*** in '96 and ***Hold On*** in '98. Sweden also took a great interest in her by releasing singles unique only to that country such as ***The Christmas Song*** and ***Seek and You Will Find*** which are now rare and highly sought after by collectors. During this period, *Motown* signed the album ***Kiss the Sky***, which featured Jaki on lead and backing vocals, and has since gone on to sell in excess of a million copies worldwide, meaning the girl from Handsworth was now *officially Motown*!

Following years of travelling the world and continuing to constantly perform live, 2009 marked a hectic year for Jaki. After being approached by the BBC to work with the *BBC Big Band* as part of their *Radio 2* special, Jaki had only a couple of months to prepare to perform Gershwin classics, that would finally give her the opportunity to sing Jazz! Following her *Gershwin & Soul* concert in October 2009, people were amazed, having not heard her perform in this genre until now, and not even realising that this too was in her repertoire. Only two weeks after the concert was put out across the airwaves, she received a phone call again from the BBC and the second concert was confirmed, having received a phenomenal worldwide response from the first performance.

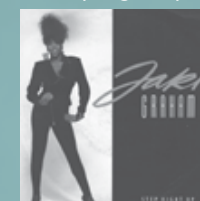
1985
Heaven knows



1986
Set me free



1986
Step right up



1986
Breaking Away





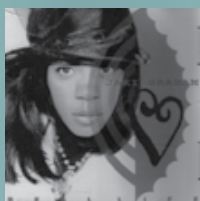
March 12th 2010 saw Jaki again performing with the *BBC Big Band*, this time for an evening of *Duke Ellington classics*. March also saw the international release of Jaki's 3 Japanese albums. Until this point ***Real Life***, ***Rhythm of Life*** and ***My Life*** had only been available in limited territories which had meant that many fans have never heard some of her finest recordings. 2010 continued to be a hive of activity as Cherry Pop records released a special edition CD of Jaki's 1986 album ***Breaking Away***. In addition to the original 12 track album, 5 bonus tracks were added, 3 of which were exclusive to this release. The summer of 2010 also saw Jaki accompany *Michael McDonald and Al Green* on their *UK Legends Arena Tour* which included Birmingham LG, Manchester MEN and London's O2 Arena, as Michael's Special Guest.

Jaki was invited to join *Sir Cliff Richard* on his successful *Soulicious Arena Tour* in October 2011, as his only British Special Guest alongside soul legends *James Ingram, Percy Sledge, Freda Payne, Lamont Dozier and Marilyn McCoo & Billy Davis Jr of Fifth Dimension*, which is available on DVD, having been filmed across 2 nights at London's O2 Arena.

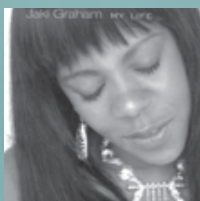
Absolute Essential – The Very Best of Jaki Graham, Jaki's new two disc compilation album, containing 28 of her finest recordings to date, is available to buy via Demon Music Group and is the first official Greatest Hits album to be released.

As for 2012, Jaki had a busy year! ***SET ME FREE 2012*** by DJ Paul Rudd feat. Jaki Graham, was released in May, having been approached to re-vocal the 1986 classic. Jaki was also finally back in the studio and finished recording her first, long awaited studio album in over 10 years. ***For Sentimental Reasons*** was released in October, giving Jaki the chance to pay homage to some of the classics she was herself brought up listening too, only this time with a more contemporary Jazz twist. This also tied in with Jaki being honoured on Birmingham's ***Walk Of Stars*** joining the likes of *Julie Walters, Ozzy Osbourne, Jasper Carrott, Bev Bevan* and more.

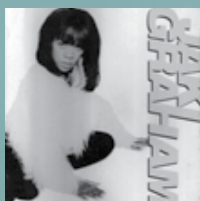
1995
Real life



1997
My life



1998
Don't keep me waiting



1998
Rhythm of life

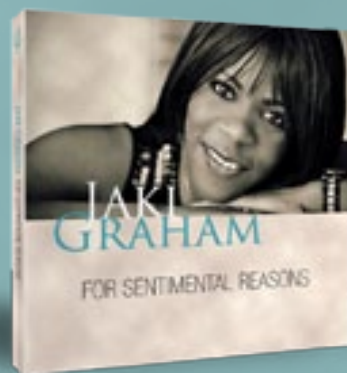




Following her intimate *For Sentimental Reasons* UK tour in 2013, Jaki received an *Honorary Doctorate in Music* from the University of Wolverhampton in recognition of her *Outstanding International Contribution to R&B, Soul and Dance*. Also, recently joining forces with Paul Wayne Gregory chocolates, a world leading Artisan and bespoke chocolatier (www.paulwaynegregory.com), we will see her own exclusive range launched alongside her forthcoming Autobiography *Heaven Knows*.

After joining forces with the British Heart Foundation in 2014 following almost losing her husband to major heart failure, Jaki is now back in the saddle and ready for a hectic 2015! And with Demon Music Group releasing Jaki's 30th Anniversary Anthology package in July 2015, along with her ongoing worldwide performances, she's only set to get busier.

As Jaki celebrates over 40 years in the industry, one thing is clear, her voice and music remain unforgettable as well as timeless classics. Her life represents so much to so many different people. Her story is an inspiration and her resilience and strength of character gives hope and strength to people worldwide facing similar struggles. No matter where you're from or what struggles you may have encountered, it is for this reason that Jaki has amassed a fan base from all walks of life. Her ability to become the conqueror rather than the victim makes her an attractive role model. Her music embodies people with a positive energy and inner strength and her voice has united and embraced nations and cultures worldwide. Of all people, Jaki would be the one who would least see these special gifts in herself. In her own words...



*'I'm nothing unique....
I'm nothing special...
.I'm just Jaki and I'm
still here darlin'!'*

