

# Bonga's Beats - Hot releases

By [Bonga Percy Vilakazi](#)

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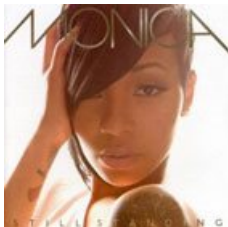
Here are some of hottest release in the R&B and soul worlds, music you need to make sure you're not seen without.



## Mary J Blige: "Stronger With Each Tear", Universal Music Group

I've been waiting for this album forever. I even have the US version, which was released late last year (in the States only). So, finally, after all the waiting, we now have our own version with more tracks (this is also the UK version). Say what you will about MJB, but the woman is on point. She does what she wants and she does it with soul. Mary can sing about a chair and make you cry. I can safely say that this is her best work to date. Now the key will be choosing the right songs as

singles, for non-believers to hear the songs on radio before buying the CD. Each Tear, In The Morning, Stairway to Heaven and I Can't Wait are just some of the great songs included. Excellent album, Mary at her best. If there's any justice in the world, this album will scoop a number of Grammys.



## Monica: "Still Standing", Sony Music

Monica is indeed still standing. There was a time when it was just her, Brandy and Aaliyah leading the R&B female scene. So it's always great when the original divas of R&B bring out new releases; I'm forever loyal to them. That being said, "Still Standing" is a solid album. I'm not crazy about it because I was expecting a lot more, but vocally and lyrically this has to be her best album. There are a handful of great tracks, which would give you your money's worth, but, all in all, she could have

done better. And only 10 songs? Everything To Me, which has been getting major play, is indeed one of the strongest songs, where she sampled the classic Silly. Another song to look out for is Stay or Go. The most refreshing thing about this album is that, this time around, her record album chose a ballad as a lead single, and that's what Monica is about.



## Jason Derulo: Gallo

Watch out, Jason is in the house! This is his debut album but Jason has been making waves in the R&B world for some time now. A couple of his songs leaked months ago, so his fans have been expecting an official release. Finally, it's here. The album is everything you'd expect from any R&B/pop album: dance tunes and ballads. His monster single Whatcha Say has put him on the map and, if that song is anything to go by, we can expect a lot more from this 20-year-old. The album is

not all that, but Jason is one guy I'll be keeping my eye on because he's too talented and versatile. Look out for the song Blind.



## Beverly Knight: "100%", Just Music

I had very high expectations when I got this album. I love British soul singers, particularly Beverly. Her past work is excellent. Sad as I am to say this, "100%" didn't meet my expectations. Beverly is a soul singer, not a pop singer. She's about soul. More than half of the songs are pop and that's not who Beverly is. I started warming up to the album from track 6, the excellent up-tempo duet with legendary Chaka Khan. Bare and Moneyback are also good songs. Beverly decided to pay homage

to the Bee Gees by singing their song Too Much Heaven. Of course, Beverly can sing any song and make it her own, but this version is exactly the same as the Bee Gees original. Robin Gibb (of the Bee Gees) is on the backing vocals. Pop lovers will enjoy this CD without a doubt.



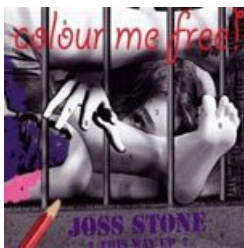
## **Ledisi: “Turn Me Loose”, Universal Music Group**

I liked Ledisi from the day she released her first album, which was a huge success. As anyone can imagine, if your first album is a success, the pressure for the second one to be even better is immense. Those who have heard the first album just might not be too happy with this one, but that's not to say it's not a good album, it is. It's just different from the first. In short, this album is a mixture of soul, gospel and rock. Think Leela James, India Aria and Jill Scott. Ledisi is not a fly-by-night, one-dimensional or half-baked talent; she is a true artist who has put in time to learn her craft and goes out to explore various genres. To get the best sound, she enlisted some of the hottest producers, such as Raphael Saadiq, Chucky Thompson and Jimmy Jam & Terry Lewis. Give her a try.



## **Usher: “Raymond vs Raymond”, Sony Music**

Usher has been a trendsetter for many years. Chris Brown, Trey Songz, Mario, Omarion all bow down to Usher. He does and they follow. But the last couple of years Usher lost me. As much as the album before this went platinum, showcasing his maturity as an artist; I wasn't very convinced. After the divorce, the drama, the heartbreaks and such, I expected this album to reflect all that he had gone through. Sad songs and all that. Maybe I had high expectations, I don't know. I felt like the album was all over the place and Usher wasn't really sure what to do. Don't get me wrong, there are some great songs, like Guilty, Fooling Around and Making Love. I just feel as if he's struggling to remain relevant. He should just do what he's good at: setting the mark, not competing with these other kids in the industry. There's no doubt, though, that the songs on this album will be great additions to his set list on his live shows, because of the energy the songs possess.



## **Joss Stone: “Colour Me Free”, EMI**

After being postponed for the longest time by her record company, I started wondering if this album would be any good. The real reason why there was such a delay was because Joss made the album herself, without any input from her record company and they were not impressed. They wanted a cash cow, but, fortunately for us and not for them, they have a true artist and soul singer on their hands. As a result, we've got an album that is 100 percent Joss, very raw and soulful. Joss is not, and has never been, about being too commercial or doing what everyone else is doing. She sings about whatever she wants to sing about. From track one to track 13 (which is the bonus track, Mr Wankerman), Joss doesn't disappoint.



## **Angie Stone: “Unexpected”, Universal Music Group**

When Angie released her first album in 1999, everyone was talking about her. She was all about the voice and the music. Four albums later (with the release of “The Art of Love and War”), she had completely lost the plot, and tons of fans. So when I heard that she had released another album, I wasn't interested at all. But boy oh boy, was I wrong! “Unexpected” caught me by surprise - it's a good album, with Maybe and Free being two of the strongest songs. If anyone had lost faith in Angie, this album just might do the trick and bring her right back to your favourites.



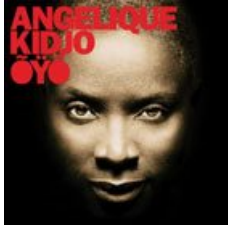
## **Bebe & Cece Winans: “Still”, Just Music**

This is without a doubt one of the most anticipated albums in urban music. It has been 15 years since siblings Bebe & Cece released an album, the last one being “Relationships” in 1994. If you're familiar with this duo's music, you can rest assured that they haven't veered away from their urban gospel sound. Their music is still very inspirational, but not in-your-face “preachy” gospel. “Still” is great album, period. Cece is okay on her own, Bebe is a great musician/producer. But together they're awesome. Some outstanding tracks include Grace, Never Thought, I Found Love and Let it Be, featuring Mary Mary.



## Vanessa Williams: “The Real Thing”, Universal Music Group

In Vanessa's own words, describing the album, “The Real Thing” is a “potpourri of breezy Latin rhythms, sultry jazz standards and dreamy pop sketches”. It features songs by Stevie Wonder and Bill Withers. I'm not very familiar with Vanessa's music other than the ballads she's famous for, but I can honestly say that this is quite a solid album. Jazz lovers will appreciate it. With covers like Bill Withers' Hello Like Before and the new Babyface-penned gems like Loving You and Just Friends, she couldn't have gone wrong. While this album may not go platinum, it could be hailed as one of her finest works.



## Angelique Kidjo: “Oyo”, Just Music

Angelique Kidjo, one of Africa's greatest exports, is one hell of a superstar and can pull in any guest star she wants. In her first album with an independent record company, Angelique has put together a collection of some of the songs she grew up listening to, resulting in an interesting interpretation of classic songs like Baby, I Love You (by Aretha Franklin) featuring Dianne Reeves, Miriam Makeba's Imbube and Lakuthon Ilanga, Curtis Mayfield's Move on Up featuring John Legend and many other

gems.



## Jaheim: “Another Round”, Gallo

With Teddy Pendergrass gone, we can count on Jaheim (amongst other soul singers) to carry the torch. Jaheim has never disappointed. Even when CD sales were low, his music was always excellent. His fifth album “Another Round” is not just any other round - it's his best round. This could possibly be one of the best R&B CDs for 2010 from a male artist. Since he released his first album in 2001, some have said he hasn't been able to match the soulfulness that was evident in “Ghetto

Love”. They might change their minds when they hear this. Songs that are sure to be hits are Til It Happens To You, Whoa, Another Round and Impossible, which samples the Percy Sledge hit When a Man Loves a Woman. Get yourself a copy!

## ABOUT BONGA PERCY VILAKAZI

Bonga Percy Vilakazi is currently the Music Supervisor for the daily hit youth drama on etv, Rhythm City; where he is also one of the story liners. He is also a monthly contributor for Soul Magazine where he was the Senior Writer; and also frequently writes for True Love and Drum where he has interviewed a host of local and international celebrities including Tyler Perry, Toni Braxton, Deborah Cox, India Arie, Maxwell and Kenny Lattimore.

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