

# SADIE JEMMETT – BIOGRAPHY

Sadie Jemmett's extraordinary songs reflect a remarkable life. Behind the entrancing, eloquence of her lyrics and the subtle acoustic beauty of her music lies a restlessly seeking spirit and a rich but frequently dark experience. Her peripatetic journey has followed a jagged course from a wildly bohemian childhood through being a teenage runaway, a backing singer in a reggae band and a touring actress to her role today as one of the most magical new singer-songwriters to excite our ears in many years. Somewhere along the way, she also found time to work with adults with learning difficulties, spend a year busking in Berlin, write the music for an award-winning play in Paris and to become a mother. Every one of these kaleidoscopic experiences has helped to shape her into a potent singer-songwriter who stands in the great lineage of the art from classic era Joni Mitchell and Neil Young to the likes of David Gray and Ryan Adams today, and yet who shines out as a profoundly unique voice.

Born in a Cambridgeshire village to parents who were both actors, her childhood was chaotic, unconventional and troubled. Shuttling between her father, a mother who became a priest and a succession of families with whom she boarded, by the time she was 11 she'd already had half a dozen homes and run away from most of them. "Nobody really brought me up at all," she recalls. "I was left to my own devices, really. Looking back it was very dark."

Solace came in music when she took up the guitar at the age of 12 after being packed off to board with a family in Hertfordshire. "They had a great record collection and I got to hear people like Joni Mitchell, John Lennon, Bob Dylan and Led Zeppelin," she recalls. "It was perfect timing and it was my opening to a new world. I was in such a state of anxiety because I never knew what was going to happen next and then I discovered this music. I found I could play it and it was mine and nobody could take it away from me. It was the first thing in my life that made me think everything was going to be OK".



Hearing Joni Mitchell's Blue was a particular moment of epiphany. "Everything about her songs was reassuring," she says. "It seemed like she had the most familiar voice I'd ever heard. I didn't want to copy her. But she inspired me to become myself."

By the age of 14, she was "doing pretty much what I wanted and nobody could stop me... playing guitar and singing and falling in love with boys." At 16, she took off on her own and moved to Edinburgh, where she fell in with a reggae band called the African Ambassadors and spent a year on the road with them as a backing singer. When that ended, she became an au pair in Switzerland, before returning to London to enroll in drama college. She soon dropped out and moved back to Scotland where she spent a year working with adults with learning difficulties.

Back in London she was discovered singing on the stairs at a party and at the age of 17 was asked to join a band called Bridge. But on the news of the unexpected death of her father a year later, she took off again. "That was my way of dealing with things – leave and hope it would be better over there," she reflects. "I

suppose I was looking for somewhere I could feel grounded, somewhere I could call home because I'd never really had one."

She ended up Berlin, just after the wall had come down and saw an advert for a band called Easter Island who were looking for a singer. Living in a squat, busking by day and singing by night with the band on the city's burgeoning underground scene, it was an "amazing" time she says with hindsight but within a year she was on the move again, hitching to Spain and eventually arriving on the west coast of Ireland, where she lived in a tumbledown cottage.

"That was when I really started writing songs," she says. "I'd hang out at sessions in little Irish bars, where everyone in the entire pub would be expected to sing. I learnt a lot from that." Working her way around Ireland, she wrote the music for a couple of plays at the Galway Arts Theatre and enjoyed a sojourn in Dublin, writing songs and poetry "and drinking a lot."

By now, she had reached the grand old age of 21 and decided her life needed some structure. She returned to Sussex, enrolled in a drama course and formed the band Soil, who enjoyed some success on the London circuit and excited record company interest.

Both were shelved when she was invited to join a touring theatre company, writing the music and performing in the show. Traveling in an old converted school bus, the show toured around Europe and as far as Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

When that was over, she settled in Paris with plans to pursue a theatrical career, but it was her musical talent that came to the fore when she collaborated on the music for Resonance, which played at the Teatre d'Atelier in summer 2000 and went on to own a Moliere award. An album of the songs from the show sold 3,000 copies in two months through the theatre while the song, "Making Sense", became a playlist favourite on Paris radio station FIP.

It led to more theatre work, including writing the music for a production of Brecht's Good Woman Of Setchuan at the National Theatre Chaillot and there were high hopes of a record deal. In the meantime, however, she had got pregnant. "I walked into this record company office and as soon as they saw I was seven months pregnant, their interest drained away," she says ruefully.

Back in London, living with her daughter Thalia in a two room flat in Camden, she began performing as a solo artist. "Up until that point I'd always felt that I needed a band or a producer behind me. But everything I'd been through and the songs I was writing gave me the strength to realise that I could do it on my own. I didn't need to hide behind anybody else."

Sadie's debut album 'The Blacksmith's Girl' was mixed and co-produced in Los Angeles by Grammy winner David Bianco (Bob Dylan, Johnny Cash), mastered in London by Kevin Metcalfe (Queen/David Bowie/Robert Plant) and produced by Steve Lee.

The Blacksmith's Girl is the distillation of Sadie's astonishing life story. Mostly written over 2010, the magical, eloquently confessional songs are all about coming to terms with her extraordinary and often traumatic past. Many of them delve deep into her own sub-conscious. Yet like the best songs of Joni Mitchell, at the same time they're far more than pages torn from a private diary.

The album was released in autumn 2011 on Wildflower, the label run by American folk legend Judy Collins.

*written by Nigel Williamson (2010)*

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