

## MUSIC

# Skin tells her story of fame

**"I've had to learn to blow my own trumpet because – as a black female singer – no-one was going to do it for me," explains Skin down the phone from her Ibiza home.**

As the frontwoman of Skunk Anansie, Deborah Dyer – AKA Skin – offered an alternative voice to the machismo of Brit rockers such as Oasis and Blur during the 90s.

"If I am modest I disappear," she says.

"I don't like to sit here and say, 'I was the first black woman to headline Glastonbury'. That's not my personality.

"But one of the ways that racism works is that it erases what black people do. "It erases our successes."

Black, British and queer, Skin, now 53, was a rarity in the fairly homogeneous landscape of 90s pop and rock.

Her autobiography, fittingly titled *It Takes Blood And Guts*, charts a difficult but warm childhood in Brixton, south London, through to her hard-touring years in Skunk Anansie – a band that defied expectation, not only because of its diverse line-up of musicians.

The book also touches on Skin's activist work, campaigning against apartheid and for LGBT rights, and glitzier turns like her

BY ALEX GREEN

stint as a judge on the Italian version of the X Factor.

Add to that her late reinvention as a globetrotting DJ and close relationship with the fashion world, including the late Alexander McQueen, and you are guaranteed some good stories.

"I have three brothers so I was raised in a house of boys," she recalls.

"There was a lot of man-energy around.

"In Jamaican families, in Jamaican culture, if someone is hungry you feed them.

"If someone comes to your house then you put down an extra plate. That's cultural.

"And my mum, a nurse, was like that.

"Lots of Jamaican were like that.

"They showed their love by filling your belly."

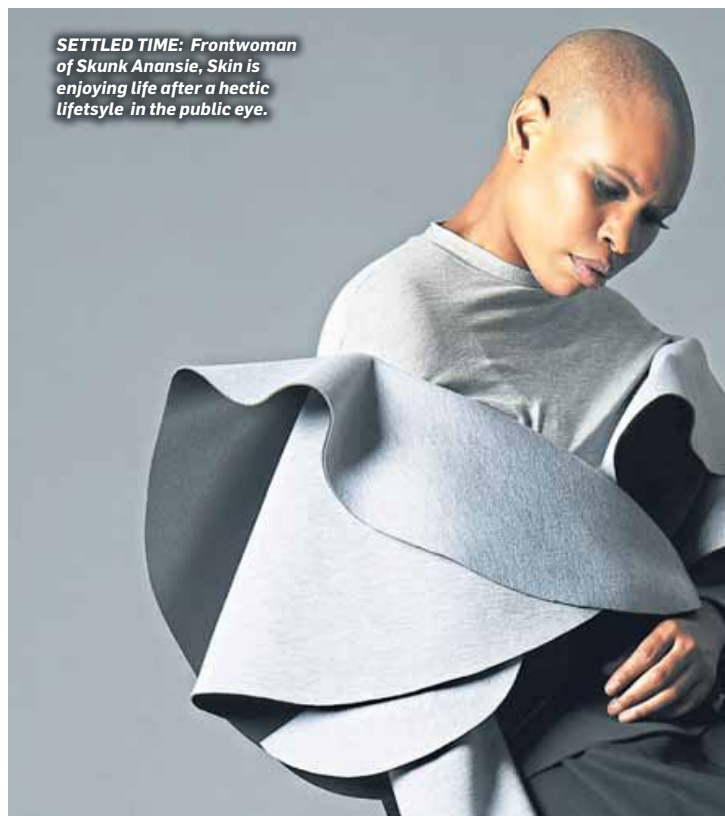
Skin's memories of Brixton in the 70s and 80s are mixed, she says.

The riots of 1981 and 1985 left an impact – spurring her on to activism.

"The negative things that were happening to people were literally happening outside my front door.

"Things that you read about, they were happening to me and our generation.

**SETTLED TIME:** Frontwoman of Skunk Anansie, Skin is enjoying life after a hectic lifestyle in the public eye.



"I was raised with the concern of, 'This just isn't right. Why is that fair? That person shouldn't die in that way. That person shouldn't be treated that way'.

"You just see a lot of things growing up that you just don't think are very fair, so you want to change things."

Much of Skin's family still lives in Brixton – including her mother and one of her brothers – but some have moved on because of various factors including rising rents.

Skunk Anansie's peak originally stretched from 1995's *Paranoid & Sunburnt* to 1999's *Post Orgasmic Chill*, before the band split for a decade.

Throughout, Skin's fame – she was instantly recognisable for her shaved head – was both a blessing and a curse.

"Entourages can be a very dangerous thing to an artist because they shield you from things you need to know – and things you don't need to know," she says, with a knowing laugh.

"Sometimes they get it really, really wrong – which is why I don't have one!"

Much of the book explores Skin's struggle to maintain connection with her family, friends and partners as she tours the world.

Aided by journalist and friend Lucy O'Brien, Skin began her book before the

## Latest music OUR PICK OF THIS WEEK'S

### WARD THOMAS INVITATION

Invitation is the fourth album from Hampshire twins Catherine and Lizzy Ward Thomas, whose country sound has been a big hit with Radio 2 audiences.

It's a fairly gentle listen, a pleasant album which loyal fans will enjoy, but may fail to grab new listeners.

The twins' voices sound great for Halfway, a track with singer James Blunt, and Human, a cover of The Killers' song with Jack Savoretti, which was recorded live at the SSE Arena in Wembley. However, when someone else is living up your album it's not a good sign.

### CARLA BRUNI CARLA BRUNI

Since 2002, Bruni has repeatedly topped the charts in France, exploring poetry and contemporary music in the popular Gallic style the Brits like to call pop-jazz.

This, her sixth album, is almost totally made up of original songs, bar a cover of a Spanish standard and a song Bruni wrote for Canadian singer Isabelle Boulay a few years ago.

Bruni's huskiest tones audibly struggle, before she settles into a sing-song mode.

But, even there, her music is disarming and this is a record well worth your time.

### ALBUM OF THE WEEK

#### TRAVIS 10 SONGS

Twenty years since they won the first of two best British group awards at the Brits, Travis return with their ninth studio album.

True to its simple name, this offering comes in 10 unique parts, pairing lead singer Fran Healy's breathy falsetto with a mixture of contemplative piano, classic rock guitar and drums.

In many ways, this record has all the things that brought joy to fans of the Scottish rock band in their heyday.

Ever the band's strength, it shifts with ease from loud to soft, animated to moody – offering both a spring in your step and a moment of sobriety, in a collection which grows on you with each listen.

