

## Moses Boyd Bio, August 2025

By Ciaran Thapar

On the evening of 14th July 2025, the black, green and red of Chris Ofili's Union Black flag flapped in the summer breeze from the domed roof of London's Somerset House. Meanwhile, down below, Moses Boyd was busy reigniting the flame of his public performance. He'd spent some time away from the spotlight, peppered with occasional specialist shows: Theaster Gates Pavilion, Serpentine Gallery, Hyde Park [2022], Basement Jaxx's Simon Ratcliffe, Tokyo [2023] Nala Sinephro, We Out Here [2025].

As the sun set, colouring the sky pink then dark blue, casting a shadow over the courtyard, he joined the likes of Sampha, Mica Levi, Mansur Brown and others to improvise a soundtrack to the debut screening of short films about Black British life by Akinola Davis Jr.

"When are all of us ever going to be on stage like that again? Maybe never," Boyd reflects a few days later, taking stock of the star-studded ensemble, and how London has progressed from when he was a 20-something with a dream. "The era in which I was most active before doesn't exist in the same way now. People have moved on, the scenes and venues are different. That's how it should be – things should change. So it was a nice way to come back and see everyone."

He's sitting at the back of his garden, in the depths of south-east London, inside the home studio that he has built as a shelter for the expansive next phase of his musical evolution. A Yamaha drum kit sits in one corner, an organ bought second-hand from the owner of a local instrument shop in another. Incense ash dusts the surfaces. Wires snake on the floor.

In five years of quiet personal growth, Moses Boyd has refined his artistry with patience and precision, arriving at an assured, expansive sophomore album that is set to reinforce his reputation as a visionary of contemporary British music. In five years of quiet growth Moses Boyd has refined his artistry with patience and precision, arriving at a sophomore album that feels both visionary and assured. His critically acclaimed, Mercury Prize-nominated debut, *Dark Matter* – a triumphant amalgamation of flourishing live instrumentation, meticulous beat-making and protestful guest lyricism – came out in February 2020, on the cusp of the

COVID-19 pandemic. He'd just completed his sold-out European tour, closing it with a homecoming show at Brixton Electric.

"It was well-received, but I didn't get to perform it as much as I should have," he remembers frankly, on the album's stunted rollout. Two years later, he emerged from the cocoon of lockdown, his name scribed in musical history, his life transformed, "trying to work out this new world that we were being let back into." He got married and bought a house, planting roots in the same south-of-the-river soil that first incubated the seeds of his sound.

"Creatively, I was like, well, this music is old to me now, I've got to start making something new. As an artist, you have to be sensitive to what is going on around you. I noticed myself having lots of conversations with musicians about our relationship with faith. That's how I came up with the new album concept."

*Songs For Sinners* is a gospel project about "pulling towards or running away from faith," he continues. "And not just Christianity, or even religion – although that's the lens I come at it from – I mean faith in general." It is the slow-cooked result of an aspiration that began in his teens, back when he "didn't have the tools, the knowledge, the life lived" to try pulling off such a bold experimental feat.

"I grew up in church and I grew up singing – not in a choir, just singing. Then when I got into playing jazz, I saw a lot of parallels. Artists from the gospel world inspired me – Fred Hammond or Tye Tribbett or Kirk Franklin. They were fierce in how they pushed the style. I've always been interested in saying: okay, these are hymns, but how can we take them further?"

The recording process started when Paul Epworth offered Boyd time at The Church Studios in north London. "The stars aligned," he grins. At first, thinking big, he plotted to record a full church service, but the logistics proved tricky, with "too many variables out of my control." So he chose his favourite hymns, many of which, he says, will be recognisable to the full spectrum of those who were raised attending church – West Africans and Caribbeans, Latter-day Saints to Jehovah's Witnesses – but also relatable to anyone, anywhere. Then he began recording and redesigning them, binding the spine of a new sound together, page by page.

At the beginning of 2023, he spent a month between St Lucia and Dominica. Photos from the trip show him on the beach, headphones on, with his back arched over a laptop full of stems – including recordings of relatives singing in his kitchen. Key contributors to *Songs For Sinners*, their ensemble can be heard on the moody, disorientating 'I Surrender All' alongside Pro Era rapper Chuck Strangers, the booming, saxophone-decorated sub-bass of 'It Is Well' and the emotive, climactic finale 'I Believe'.

"I call them the 'kitchen choir'. Now I look back, it's quite special. I invited them to record because I knew they'd have a connection to these songs...I didn't want it to sound too professional. I wanted it to feel like a real church, where it's slightly rough around the edges," he says. "The Pentecostal church setting in the eastern Caribbean has a very unique flavour. In the deep bush, you might find a country pastor picking up an electric guitar; he only knows three chords, but he is playing for his life. It's not polished. I love it. And that's an element I wanted to preserve."

His son Eden was born in July 2023; his home studio was ready a few months later. Energised, if slowed, by the demands of fatherhood, he kept chipping away, filling his new creative base with storied instruments, whiteboard notes and recording equipment, refining a finished product. Collaborators like Raelle – who lends her voice on the double bass-growling, Sade-meets-afrobeats 'War' – and Amber Simone – whose soulful words-of-wisdom and contralto tones rock-and-roll on 'Criticise' – joined him.

The entirety of *Songs For Sinners* was completed before Boyd partnered with Parlophone, his first toe-dip into the waters of major label life, meaning that he has retained creative control whilst gaining the infrastructural backing that can, if all goes to plan, take him to the next level. He wrote all the lyrics and music himself, showcasing for the first time at such scale his elevated dexterity as a multidisciplinary artist whose jazz-drummer sensibility underpins a larger, writer-producer vision.

At 12 songs in length, the album is a concise and accessible yet profound and life-affirming journey through the spiritual realm of the Black Atlantic. It is a love-letter to the inherited protections of community, an attempt to bottle a

hybrid, humane antidote in the face of growing universal unease – a globalist sermon to scale-up from *Dark Matter's* Brexit Britain preoccupations.

"I think now, more than ever, people are looking for something more. People want hope. People want to cling to faith. People want to run from faith. I've not lived forever, but it just doesn't feel like things have been this turbulent for a long time. So it's been interesting to hear others listen and say, 'the world needs this,' or 'this is really poignant.' It's very different to *Dark Matter*, but it also feels similar, in that it has hopefully captured something in the air, in the zeitgeist," Boyd continues.

In its blending of acoustic and electronic instrumentation, the suspenseful drums that lead into thumping 808s, and the 2000s chipmunk soul of opening track 'Precious' picks up where the previous album left off, segueing into the gospel theme with organ keys and choir notes. Later, 'Saviour' sees Boyd break into one of the rampaging drum solos that old fans will be familiar with, yet by pairing this with slowed, eerily stretched vocals he achieves an entirely new, disorientating, gothic militancy to march into the present moment.

But light keeps appearing at the end of the tunnel, ultimately outlining *Songs For Sinners* as a beacon of hope. The album's undeniable euphoric centrepiece is 'Be Alright'. A funk bass line underlines layered, hair-raising back-and-forths between a team of choral vocalists (including Boyd himself), cinematic orchestral strings, a playful electric guitar and Boyd at the height of his percussive powers – conducting the show, but also participating in it, like a disco-era Quincy Jones armed with drum sticks and the dare to jump on the mic.

"I'll be honest, this whole process has been quite mystical. I've definitely felt I've been the vessel, I've had the idea. But there have been times where it's been like, wait – where did that come from!?" he chuckles. "Whether it's the lyrics, whether it's the programming, I've just decided: this is what I need to say, this is what needs to be done, then somehow it happens. It's taught me that if you just stay in tune, it does happen."