



Sia sensation

She's the kooky, bisexual singer who flew out of Adelaide 12 years ago and now counts Christina Aguilera as a mate. Here, Sia Furler spills on life, love and therapy

words **michael harry** photography **randy larcombe**

Sia Furler marches through the Governor Hindmarsh Hotel before the sound check of her first Adelaide show in nine years. A gangly male springs into her path. The man has obviously been psyching himself up for 'the approach' for some time. "Hi Sia!" he says, his vocal chords tight. "I think... ummm... that you know my flatmate," he wavers. "I mean, my flatmate knows you. You know Sandy Woods*? Sandy?"

Sia is mercilessly blunt. "I'm sorry," she beams. "I have no idea who you are talking about." The singer is polite and sunny and fixed with a nice smile, yet underneath the cheer glints something much harder. In fact, something like *back off*. Our mistaken fan withers into the background, more than a little bruised. You get the feeling that Sia probably did know a Sandy Woods, way back when. Before the blossoming music career, before the New York loft she now calls home. But Sandy Woods doesn't know Sia anymore.

We sit on a beaten-up couch and I ask Sia if she gets annoyed by fans thinking they know her. "It used to annoy me because it happens all the time. But, then, I'm in therapy, and my therapist said to me: 'You do 17 interviews a day, then you'll go to a venue, you'll meet five more people. After the show you'll have marketing departments and other people who you need to suck up to.'" Sia mashes her blunt blonde fringe into her forehead with nutty frustration. "It's really important

for my survival to delete data. I'm like a phone memory. I have to delete the old things... otherwise there is no room for anything new."

Sia Kate Isobelle Furler entered the world in Adelaide on December 18, 1975, to art lecturer mum Loene and musician dad Phil Colson. She grew up around music and her uncle, Colin Hay, was a member of Australian group Men At Work. "I'm staying with my Mum at the moment," Sia reveals. "It's nice to see my Mum, but I realise that I did this for her – staying at the house – because it's actually an inconvenience for me. When I stay with the crew, I'm spoilt. I never touch my bag until I'm in my room and I'm opening it. This time, my mum picked me up from the airport and there I am dragging my case up the stairs, and there's no internet, and I'm like: 'Geez, what am I going to do?' In a way, it's a good reality check."

Sia, a former Adelaide High School student, rose to prominence in the mid-'90s singing with local acid-jazz outfit Crisp, and she lent her vocals to Australian DJ Friendly's hit track *Some Kind Of Love Song*. In 1997, she packed her bags for the UK, set to start life with a boyfriend she describes as "the first love of my life". Tragedy struck when he was hit by a car and killed just a week before her arrival. Sia dislikes discussing this event, yet she admits she struggled with the loss and poured her grief into music. She scored a break as a back-up singer for pop group Jamiroquai, and

began to turn heads with another English act, the cool-for-school, chill-out band Zero 7. "Working with Zero 7 afforded me the luxury of sabotaging my solo career over and over again," Sia explains. "I would sing three songs a night and I was making a killing, so I thought: 'Wow, this is easy.'" When it came time for her major-label debut *Healing Is Difficult* in 2000 Sia balked at having to hustle interest from the press, despite *The Guardian* calling the album "unexpectedly endearing".

"I didn't take responsibility for [the album], so it failed to some degree," she admits. It still produced a major hit, *Drink To Get Drunk*, and a wave of hype predicted that the former North Adelaide girl was set to be the next big thing in music.

Next, in 2005, Sia moved to the US, where she collaborated with the achingly hip musician Beck on a second major solo album, *Colour The Small One*. The album was not a huge commercial success, but it did feature one track that would change Sia's life forever: *Breathe Me*. The quirky ballad's raw yearning proved a perfect fit for the final episode of HBO drama *Six Feet Under*. "The music director put the track in as a temporary song to edit to while they looked for the real song," Sia says. "The director eventually said: 'Are you looking for another song for this? Don't.'" That tune was a cash cow for the singer because it also featured on Channel Seven during its blanket coverage of the 2008 Beijing Olympics and garnered huge attention for her third and most recent album, *Some People Have Real Problems*. Even after more than a decade of hard work and peaks of success, this is still Sia's 'breakout album'. It was the album of the month at Starbucks stores throughout America, and she performed single *Soon We'll Be Found* on *The Late Show with David Letterman*. "That was such an incredible honour," she says. "At the age of 12, I would sit in the bath and rehearse interviews with Dave."

Most recently, Sia was hand-picked by diva Christina Aguilera to write tracks for the pop icon's new album *Light & Darkness*. Major US gay and lesbian magazine *The Advocate* named the bisexual star one of its 'Top Forty under Forty' last month. "If you're an awesome person, I'll go out with you," Sia says of her romantic life. "I don't care if you have a ding or a dong, a wing or a wang, if you're a rad person, you're in."

It's clear Sia runs with a fast crowd where mates like Aguilera have 24-hour nail technicians on speed-dial. Surreal? "No," says Sia. "This is real to me because this is my real life. My friends are musicians and actors, but they're normal people. They're just like my other friends, they just have different jobs. It's not all glamour and luxury, they're f...ing hard workers and they deserve to have f...ing nail technicians. The only time to nourish yourself is when you're at home: not giving to anyone, not answering questions, not singing, not on a plane."

I ask how it feels to be back at home in Adelaide. "Coming back is like an awesome holiday," she smiles.

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"I'm driving through, and going: 'That's Grenfell Tower, that's where I pushed my first boy...'"

Sia laughs about the old faces that have come out of the woodwork before her return. "I've had hundreds of people contacting me, saying: 'What are you doing? Let's hang out!'. All these emails where I'm just waiting for the punchline, which is: 'Can I have tickets to your show?'" But I don't do that anymore. If people don't buy tickets, then they don't come."

It must be a sweet moment, I suggest. Local girl returns to her home town with a hit record for a sell-out show. Sia shrugs, unmoved.

"I don't have anything to prove. I'm a business person, and [Adelaide] isn't a big demographic. It means nothing to me. I don't have any ego issues with people not knowing who I am in this town."


Why would she? The 33-year-old is used to being the centre of attention around the world. She exudes a child-like lack of self-consciousness and – like a child – she requires constant stimulation. It feels as though Sia will swing from the rafters of the Governor Hindmarsh if my next question doesn't interest her. She presents an authentically unhinged persona, which is unpredictable and completely alluring.

"I like to say I have a nervous breakdown every seven years," Sia laughs. "Because I had one when I was about 18, then maybe 25, and last year I had a bit of a meltdown again. Now, I've got a great therapist called Shelly and she's helping me through this period. It's someone who is not going to tell anyone [my problems]. Like, I can say I'm going to put chainsaws on my feet and kick someone in the throat and she's not going to think I'm a weirdo." She cackles a low, machinegun spray of laughter.

Sia's super-sharp New York manager appears and taps his watch. It's now time for that sound check. The sturdy blonde gets up from the couch and struts onto the low stage. Her voice bounces around the empty room, rich and husky and thoroughly modern.

Minutes later, she's bundled into a van (and sits in the front seat), off to eat dinner on Gouger Street with her band before the show. "We're going to Ying Chow, table for 12 people," she says proudly. "I love it. It's my favourite restaurant. I'm going to have the BBC, deep-fried szechwan chilli beef, steamed buns, coriander chicken. I might even have a Coopers Pale Ale."

As I wander back through the half-empty hotel, I notice the gangly guy who became road kill in Sia's wake sitting at the bar. He doesn't seem phased.

"What was she like," he asks. "Oh, great... I think," I reply. The stranger just shakes his head. "I think she is just fantastic," he marvels, almost to himself, and I have to agree. Adelaide may 'mean nothing' to Sia, but Sia certainly means something to Adelaide.  Sia's new live DVD, TV Is My Parent, is available now. *Name has been changed to protect the identity of the person referred to in this article.

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