**"If I expect this all to be there, like a next record, or whatever, then I'm pretty much screwed."  
-Nelly Furtado, on the hype surrounding her debut**

**biography**

Born and raised in Victoria, British Columbia, to parents of Portuguese descent, Nelly Furtado has always been surrounded by music. Her mother is a former church choir singer, while her father -- a fan of Portuguese music styles, known as "fado" -- sings as a pastime. Her grandfather played instruments, and even her great-uncle was a renowned Portuguese marching band score composer.

All of these family elements inspired Nelly's passion for music and a broad spectrum of musical genres at that. By the age of four, young Nelly was playing the ukulele and singing in Portuguese and English, and was the trombone player of a jazz band, concert band and marching band, from nine to eighteen. Her vocal chords and dance skills were also useful with her involvement in musical plays.

**hip-hop's what she's got**

She knew early on in her childhood that she wanted to be a performer, and her dreams were realized via several chance opportunities and events throughout her life. Nelly received a tape recorder and microphone when she was eight years old, which served as a key part of her musical influences.

Exposed to the rush of new hip-hop acts spawning in the early '90s, Nelly became fascinated by the sounds of TLC, Bel Biv Devoe, Ice-T, Mariah Carey, and the new sampling methods used at the time. With the help of her tape recorder, Nelly would sample the sounds that impressed her, similar to those used by popular '90s acts. She sang into her microphone and recorded original sounds with the "scratch effect" of her keyboard.

A self-proclaimed R&B and hip-hop lover, Nelly was later exposed to the British rock sounds of the mid '90s, after a trip to her ancestral Portugal. Teenage Nelly's eyes were now open to groups such as U2, Radiohead, Oasis, while she discovered Portishead thanks to a mix tape that a friend of hers made. The tribal beats and bossa nova sounds evident in her music come from the music she was exposed to later on, such as a Brazilian compilation album that combined African and Portuguese styles.

**whoa, nelly, wow!**

The album is the product of her participation in a Toronto young performer's talent show at the age of 18. The manager of the Philosopher Kings, a popular funk/pop group, who was also present at the show, was impressed by Nelly's talent.

The only real recording experience she had up to this point was singing back-up vocals for her friend's Toronto-based hip-hop group. But that was enough to cut a demo tape with the recording team of Gerald Eaton and Brian West (of the Philosopher Kings). After much convincing on the part of Eaton and West, Nelly returned to Toronto to record more tracks.

The fruit of this work is what led to Nelly's record-contract with DreamWorks Records. Her album, entitled Whoa Nelly!, which has already spawned the hit singles "I'm Like A Bird," "Turn Off The Light" and "...On The Radio," was released in the Fall of 2000.

No stranger to touring, Nelly was part of the Lilith Fair tour, with a bill consisting of female performers such as Beth Orton, Chrissie Hynde, and of course, Sarah McLachlan (who is one of Nelly's idols). The singer-songwriter also contributed a track to the soundtrack for the film, Brokedown Palace.

**a soaring bird**

And she has her share of fans. Elton John praised Nelly's work and talent "on the record"; she was invited to pay tribute to Aretha Franklin at a tribute concert for the queen of soul; she released a duet with rap producer and singer Missy Elliot, "Get UR Freak On," appearing on the Lara Croft: Tomb Raider soundtrack; and she was invited to perform at the Area: One tour, and was named one of the most talented and beautiful women in the world by the tour organizer, Moby.

Her critically-acclaimmed debut album not only showcases the mix of musical backgrounds -- African beats, hip-hop, folk, urban style, bossa nova, and the Portuguese "fado" -- it also highlights a new talent that will definitely soar like a bird.

**overall rating**

With so many musical acts today sounding like the same homogenous contrived and formulated "noise," when something original and fresh comes along, it's easily noticeable. That's what happens when you listen to Nelly Furtado's debut album Whoa! Nelly. Her first single "I'm Like A Bird" has etched its way up the charts, and appearances on Jay Leno only cemented her place as a rising star.

Nelly's eclectic sound can be traced back to her assorted cultural background. Though she was born and raised in Canada, her Portuguese roots helped introduce her to Portugal and Brazil's top performers, giving a well-rounded international feel to her music often lacking in her counterparts. Like her music or not, you'll appreciate the refreshing break from Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera.

**personality & talent**

Nelly Furtado is one of those people that probably walks around carrying a smiley face stamp so that she can mark everyone who is down in the dumps and make them as content as she is. Her upbeat and tempo-filled album translates to her performances on stage, where she performs like she's having a party in her bedroom with her walkman on (except there are no New Kids On The Block posters, and thousands of people are watching).

She writes her own songs, which always scores big points with us, and she's able to sing in English, Portuguese and Hindi. She was inspired by Beck, which isn't a bad thing because Beck always delivers original material. Her other major influence, Portishead, is obviously inherent in her music (sometimes you think you have the wrong album on). Other times you'd think you were listening to Erykah Badu or Macy Gray, two women no one would mind being compared to (at least musically, what's up with Macy Gray's Welcome Back Kotter afro anyway?).

**sexiness**

Nelly is a beautiful girl, it doesn't take much of a genius to realize that. Why else would she have done magazine spreads before having released only one song? Her skillful naughtiness plays right into the hands of men everywhere who say they want a nice girl, but really want a woman who will whip them into submission (or is it the other way around?).

**accomplishments & fame**

She was asked to appear for 4 tour dates with Lilith Fair in 1999, which helped catch the album a studio label. Though it took a while for her talent to be recognized in the US, she has had much success in her two home countries of Canada and Portugal.

The good news for her though, is that she has Dreamworks backing her, and they hate to lose money on their investment, so look for them to cross-promote across their huge distribution network.

**natural beauty**

Her easy smile and contagious laugh only add to her natural beauty. If she was always seemingly depressed like Fiona Apple, her appeal ratio would drop faster than Charlie Sheen's pants. Keep that sorriso (smile) going Nelly.

**personal style**

Nelly's personal style crosses two fields. Sometimes she looks like an extra in a hip-hop music video, and other times she looks like a back-up singer for the Indigo Girls or Sarah McLachlan. She has the hip-hop, urban, lost hippie look going. Let's call it the "Nelly" style; "Cher" style it isn't.

We like her. We wish she remains a big star and hope she always remembers the little people (yes, that's us).

**« ME ON ME »**

I am impressed when music matters, when genres are broken, when spirits are lifted, when people make a difference, and when people are true to themselves. I am impressed by: Leonard Cohen, Antonio Carlos Jobim, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Woodstock, Free Tibet, free shows for tens of thousands, Marvin Gaye, Bob Marley, De La Soul, good films, visual art, Andy Warhol, jazz, improvisational anything, artists who I watch perform and they bring me to tears, Jeff Buckley, going to a rave, writing poetry about the city, tripping out on a good book, traveling to a foreign city and not knowing anybody...the list goes on and on.

I have always been in awe of nature and all things innovative. Although I grew up in Victoria, B.C, a mere suburb of a city, I know what independence is, I know what soul is and I know what God is. I know what it feels like to sing on the top of a mountain as if God is pumping Abraham straight into me from heaven. I was performing in both Portuguese and English by age four, and playing ukulele and trombone through ages nine to eighteen. I played the trombone in a jazz band, concert band and marching band, and sang and danced in musicals.

I've seen lots and grown lots in my short life span. I have been the bully, I have been bullied, been insecure, been precocious, been lost, been found again, been praised, been heralded, been shamed and been alone. I am not sheltered and I have never been, although family is very important to me. I am quite street smart and my pain often fuels my passion, but more often my spirit does. I aspire, like anyone, to do great things with my life. I want to be Jack Kerouac, Mona Lisa, Ghandi and Mother Theresa all at the same time. I want to inspire people but not in a cheap way. There is an artist in me. I see art everywhere I walk. I believe I was born to sing and to create music that emotionally connects. I was born to document the way I see the world and the experiences I've had in it.

Considering my musical heritage it seems inevitable that I would pursue this musical dream. In S. Miguel, Azores, my late Portuguese grandfather played several instruments. His brother, my great-uncle, was a famed marching band score composer or 'maestro' in his village who today remains somewhat of a legend to the towns people. To this day, even after his death, hundreds of his musical scores remain under lock and key in his basement despite several attempts to confiscate them by local music-lovers. My mother sings in the church choir and my father also enjoys casual singing and has a deep interest in the Portuguese style of music 'fado', or 'fate'. These Portuguese elements and influences are very much a part of what I like to call my 'musical hardrive'.

I received my first tape recorder at age eight - I sang into the microphone and recorded songs myself. I received a keyboard with a built in scratch effect at age eleven. I was writing rhymes at age fourteen but that was a phase which only lasted a couple of months because the hip-hop culture looked so appealing to me then.

I've always been obsessed with new music. I'm nineteen years old so I can't say that my influences are Pink Floyd and Kate Bush, because they aren't. I wasn't even born. I was listening to a haunting Paris sample or a PM Dawn song with a sampled Spandeau Ballet chorus hot off the radio. I was into anything sensational and loud. It was somehow so refreshing to my young ears. Ice T, LL Cool J, Salt n Pepa, Bel Biv Devoe, New Edition, High 5, Jackson 5, Boyz II Men, Mariah Carey, Mary J. Blige, Pharcyde 'passin' me by', Del, Hieroglyphics Crew, TLC , Janet, Word Up Magazine, anything rap and R&B, DJ Quik, Young MC, Diggable planets, Tribe Called Quest or anything I could get my hands on be it a bootleg off the radio or a friend's mix tape. Prince stands vitally, somewhere in the middle.

Anything that was created using a drum machine or a sampler - at ages 14-16 I was there with bells on. The culmination of these listening experiences led to my first studio recording at age 16, belting out full-fledged R&B vocals for a friends Toronto hip-hop group.

New influences came to me as I got older and started listening to my older brother's CD player. I also went to Portugal for a summer vacation and opened up to rock influences like Radiohead, Smashing Pumkins, U2, Pulp, Oasis, and Sarah Maclaughlin. Next came the discovery of Portoisehead, whose style had a significant impact on my writing and production experiences from that point on. Especially intriguing was Beth Gibbons haunting vocal style, which I could mimic to a tee for a good year following. With this wave of influences came Madredeus, Sade, Pedro Abrunhosa, Cornershop, Amalia Rodrigues, Tricky, Prodigy, Bjork, anything Brazilian especially Bossa Nova, Hindu music, and techno in all musical forms, especially drum and bass. Throughout this period I also discovered the greatest hits collections of the Beatles and Simon and Garfunkel. From this point on, the door had been opened up real wide, and it only gets wider each day.

Flashy urban music of the early nineties gave me a love for sampling, technology and hip-hop. It taught me how to be a bold singer, and how to sing with attitude. The later wave of influences taught me passion and meaning. They taught me how to express emotion and melancholy, how to write songs from the heart, develop a personal style and edge to songs and how to develop a signature vocal style.

All of these influences and all of the life experiences I've had that fuel my lyrical content come together to make me, as an artist, urban folk alternative, if that helps any. Through all of my recording experiences I have held good songs in a very high place. I believe in the power of words and the mystery of a good melody. What is music until you make it anyway?