

Mitch Winehouse

No one is more aware than Mitch Winehouse of the accusation soon to be leveled at him.

"Well of course I wouldn't be in this position without Amy," he laughs indulgently, as if anyone could think differently or even see that fact as a negative, "but now the opportunity is there, why not take it? Who wouldn't want to make an album?"

For Mitch Winehouse to cut a record called ***Rush of Love*** at the age of 60 is an unlikely twist of fate, especially one with a song selection revealing a real depth of knowledge and impeccable taste.

But it comes from a perfectly natural place and reveals the roots of his own, as well as his daughter's musical inspiration. This is no album of the usual Rat Pack standards - it is jazz, swing, crooning, if you like, but not pop. This is the Winehouse musical DNA.

After all, Mitch certainly proved his worth as a credible jazz artist – and also fulfilled a lifelong dream – by kicking off 2011 hosting his own headline show at London's world-renowned jazz venue, Ronnie Scotts. Clearly in his element, Mitch delivered a timeless performance showcasing his debut work to a Sunday lunchtime crowd seeming to the brim.

The ingredients of ***Rush of Love*** are all to be found within a stone's throw. Family, friends and an upbringing soundtracked by the sort of music Mitch has been singing ever since. Only this time, it's on record.

Even the setting, a sunny day in East London, is perfect. This part of the world may have been colonised by fashionistas and media types since he was a kid, but the brickwork still shines with the lustre of another era.

"My father owned a barber shop on Commercial Street and my mother had a hairdressers at the back of it," he says, waving his hand in the direction of Spitalfields from this Shoreditch cafe, "All I remember since day one was music. Jazz, swing, lots of Sinatra. When it was quiet, my mum and my auntie would ballroom dance together across the floor.

"We lived above this place with aunties, uncles, grandparents, great-grandparents. Every floor had different music. We were singing all the time, together, on our own. I mean, it was a poor world, no indoor toilets, kids still died of rickets through poor diet. But when I look back, the music soundtracks a happy time. It's a way of life that's gone forever but the memories are the wonderful people and music. It oozes through these songs.

"Amy had a very similar upbringing, always aunties, uncles, grandparents and friends around....and always music."

On ***Rush Of Love***, Mitch uses a freedom to experiment to great effect. The selection is surprisingly eclectic, no standard My Way covers, he digs deep into a form music he loves and clearly knows inside out. There are even four originals written by collaborator and producer Tony Hiller that already sound like jazz standards - ***Rush Of Love To The Heart, Tell Me, No More Broken Hearts*** and ***Nights***.

"If I was Michael Buble," he astutely observes, "I'd have that pressure to sing songs that people already know, to keep up the record sales. But I'm lucky, there's no pressure, I have a freedom to go deeper, singing new songs and those I don't want forgotten. Older people will recognise the songs, younger people might learn some new ones.

So alongside the new Hiller compositions, we have ***Please Be Kind***, a 1938 song first performed by Mildred Bailey. Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan and Sinatra have all recorded it.

How Insensitive is a Antonio Carlos Jobim composition that anyone from Judy Garland to Iggy Pop have put their name next to. ***You Go To My Head*** is a real jazz aficionado favourite.

"***Close Your Eyes*** is a beautiful jazz song, but a less known Sinatra song," Mitch enthuses, "Stacey Kent does it, but I've never heard anyone else and it's just wonderful. I had such a good time making this album. We tried 40 songs we loved and worked through them with a pianist. If it didn't work for us, we moved on, but just reliving them was enough."

Teaming up with Tony Hiller, writer of *Save Your Kisses For Me* and hundreds of other jazz and pop standards, was another logical step.

Mitch joins a list of illustrious artists from Elton John to Matt Monro who have performed Tony's songs.

The Hillers and Winehouses have been firm family friends for generations, Tony and his singer brother Irving grew up with Mitch's Dad and uncle, plus a cast of characters from villains to cabbies that formed their East End community.

This musical heritage passed on down the line. Mitch would stand toddler Amy on a table to sing for the family, leaving lines out for Amy to fill in. Her brother Alex is an accomplished guitarist.

Amy's mother Janis had four uncles who were professional musicians. Mitch's Mum Cynthia, he confesses, had a more eclectic taste than him and even up to her death 4 years ago regularly introduced the family to new music.

So now posters around Shoreditch announce revivalist tea dances for the fashionable youngsters, Mitch's entrance into the music world seems somewhat timely. Mitch has been a businessman, salesman and latterly a London cabbie. Until his daughter began persuading him to record 6 years ago, 'singer' was not a career move.

But while the kids listen to his daughter, Winehouse senior is taking them further back to the roots.

"Everyone likes this music, young and old," he says, "but there is so much more that no one's ever heard. I was looking up lyrics on the internet and came across Sinatra performances. The comments from young people underneath are all saying things like 'this is the most beautiful song I've ever heard, I didn't know Sinatra could sing like this'. They only hear My Way these days."

"Suddenly, I just want to perform," he concludes, a little surprised at himself, "I want the chance."