

## “Shine”

Interview with Leah Harris

May 20, 2022

Leah Harris is a renowned musical artist currently based in New York City, however she grew up in Windsor, Ontario just across the river from Detroit. She has been influenced by the Motown sound since an early age, which sparked her initiation into the world of music, specifically focusing on piano, singing and songwriting.

Leah approached Runner Magazine with an interest in a feature to highlight her newest single “Shine” as a way to reconnect with Detroit. Despite having wide success as a musical artist across the globe, she expressed the importance of paying homage to her hometown and to Detroit as a way to further help her connect to her roots. Here, we present a short interview about her early years, when she was regularly interacting with the local Detroit community.



“Shine” by Leah Harris on YouTube

*How did growing up on the other side of the Detroit River from Detroit impact your interest in music from a young age?*

**Leah Harris:** Growing up near Detroit had a huge impact on my passion for music and my musical development. We received all the Detroit radio stations in Windsor, and I was immediately drawn to Motown, R&B, Blues and Soul. Detroit has a special sound and a completely unique energy.

*What Detroit venues did you used to perform at? What artists did you perform with and what years were you performing in Detroit?*

**LH:** Most of my experiences in Detroit were with Valerie Barrymore and the Foundation of Funk. I met Val through my best friend Elena Papillo, because the two of them were in a group together called “Detroit Women.” Val needed a second backup singer to perform with Elena, and I was so happy to jump on the opportunity. Valerie is an award-winning vocalist and songwriter and definitely my biggest influence, as she took me under her wing and introduced me to the Detroit scene.

Foundation of Funk has played at Arts, Beats & Eats. The Royal Oak Theater, The Magic Stick and the Detroit Fireworks. After I’d already left town, the band performed at the Common Ground Festival opening for Gladys Knight, and I was definitely sad to miss that show!

I’ve had the pleasure of working with a variety of inspiring Detroit musicians, including bassist Takashi Iio, recipient of numerous Detroit Music Awards, Billy Wilson, the founder of the Motown Alumni Association, and jazz vocalist Shahida Nurullah, recipient of the Spirit of Detroit Award. My biggest influence was definitely Valerie Barrymore. And the last time I performed in Detroit, I had the chance to perform for Thornetta Davis which was a huge honor.

*From your point of view, how does Detroit and Windsor impact each other, being so close yet in completely different countries?*

**LH:** It's funny because the cities are so close, but the country border allows them to develop so independently at the same time. Detroit has such a deep history, especially with Soul music, and this has certainly rubbed off on Windsor. At the same time, Windsor is influenced by the Canadian scene and has some stations that promote more Canadian artists. Since most of Canada is, of course, not in the Detroit area, it meant we were exposed to completely different styles in addition to that Motown soul.

Detroit reminds me more of NYC in the sense that it's a big city that requires a lot of hustle. If you want to break into the music scene, it's a different kind of process. Windsor also holds itself to a higher standard musically, but I did find that the smaller size of the city made it easier to hone in on my craft and keep track of events and local artists. With that said, any bigger city, like Detroit, will offer more specific niches for particular genres. They are both amazing and I feel blessed to have been exposed to both.

*Can you discuss the focus of your new single? You mentioned it was about your experience and appreciation for Detroit...*

**LH:** I wrote "Shine" about the hustle of creative people. It takes dedication to wake up every morning and decide to pursue a nontraditional dream, especially in an industry like music where the business model makes it that much harder to support yourself. Many of the Detroit musicians I performed with came from generations before me and had experienced unbelievable challenges I have never been exposed to. Their drive and dedication to music through it all was so inspiring, and the ongoing hustle of Detroit musicians has made such an enormous impact on history and the global music scene.

Everywhere I have lived-from Dublin, to Sweden, to NYC, to Tanzania-they are playing Motown. It's a brilliant, deep, uplifting, heartfelt genre that connects with everyone. Even now in NYC, my favorite hangout is Ashford & Simpson's Sugar Bar, owned by Valerie Simpson who is half of the famous songwriting team that wrote hits for Motown Records, like "Ain't No Mountain High Enough," "I'm Every Woman," and "Let's Go Get Stoned." No matter where I go, I can't seem to get away from Motown, and I hope I never will!

You can access the song "Shine" by Leah Harris at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4F1Zz9AEUoc>

*Leah Harris is a Canadian singer-songwriter inspired by the sounds of Alicia Keys, Prince, Amy Winehouse and Aaliyah. Leah combines Classic Soul and 90s R&B with a modern twist complimented by a light, yet inspiring songwriting style. Leah's unique style has been publicly endorsed by musicians like Montell Jordan, Kabir Sehgal and Valerie Simpson, and her original songs have received over 350,00 streams on more than 800 Spotify playlists.*

*Leah grew up in Windsor, Ontario, less than ten minutes from Detroit. Guided by musical encouragement from both parents, Leah learned piano from her mother at age four and internalized the fundamentals of writing from her Country songwriter father at age nine. By age fifteen, a strong Motown and Blues influence had developed from the nearby Detroit scene, and Leah was performing Soul music at weekly gigs.*

*In 2008, Leah moved to Boston to study Piano Performance at Berklee College of Music. There she met producer Adam Rhodes, who went on to produce Leah's first EP "I Don't Believe in Love," released in 2014. Leah then moved to Sweden in 2015 where she joined the Blues and songwriting scenes, before relocating to Helsinki, Finland to design the 'Yousician Piano' app from scratch. The app has since become the*

*world's most popular piano learning app used by over one million students, and Leah's experience in Helsinki added further color to her writing.*

*Leah moved to Dublin in February 2017, which was the base of a two-year independent tour of 13 countries across three continents. At the end of the tour in 2018, Leah moved to New York City and soon after released her EP "Treat Me Good," recorded at Brooklyn's Systems Two Studios. It didn't take long for Leah to become a part of the NYC soul music scene, and within her first month she was invited to perform at such notable venues like Ashford & Simpson's Sugar Bar, The Delancey, Rockwood Music Hall, Cafe Wha? and Club Groove.*

*After four years of musical development in New York City, Leah headed to Nashville in 2021 to record two original songs with producer Sal Oliveri. The first release, "Shine" was released in May of 2022 at Ashford & Simpson's Sugar Bar and emphasizes the importance of following one's own creative journey. Leah continues to perform regularly both in NYC and internationally while she prepares to release her second single of the year in late 2022.*

Follow Leah's journey on Instagram at [@leahharrisofficial](https://www.instagram.com/leahharrisofficial) .

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