



## The Songbird

*An exotic beauty of Arabic and Dominican descent, Carol C. is the mesmerizing quotient in this super stellar band.*

Her parents met and fell in love in the Dominican Republic. She points out there are actually quite a few Arabic people in D.R. and that a lot of people are virtually unaware of this. Her mother taught her to sing and the very first song she learned was “Pio-Pio,” a traditional Latin lullaby. She smiles warmly as she reminisces about the days when she would sing this song for company as a kid. She later recorded it on the group’s first album, as an homage to her musical roots.

When she was four, Carol told her mom she wanted to sing opera. “Why opera? What about it attracted you at such a young age?” I ask. She saw it as challenging and difficult. She thought, “I want to do that. I want to try that!” Initially, her father was not thrilled about her wanting to get involved in the music industry. He eventually approved of her decision to study opera for four years only because it is a classical form of music.

Having two parents of different ethnicities, Carol grew up in a home listening to a wide range of musical rhythms. She says that as she grew, she fell in love with Arabic music and began to seek it out. Egyptian singer, Natacha Atlas, was a great inspiration and she would often mimic the melodic inflections in her voice. Her brother also contributed to her music influences by introducing Carol to Kraftwerk, an electronic group from Germany. Drawn to the electronic element, she began following groups like Depeche Mode and The Cure. She also discovered trip-hop and jazz and how she could play with all these sounds. Never waning, her deep love for bachata and ballads remained. She affectionately calls it musica romantica. Her ear loves live instrumentation and traditional rhythms. She knew these were the sounds this band would make

music with.

*“I love singing, in both English and Spanish. If I picked one, I would definitely miss the other.”*

**You have visited many places over the last ten years. What do you love most about taking your music all over the world?** “I love when we go to a country where English is not the primary language yet the audience knows the lyrics to our songs. Today, the internet allows music to be heard anywhere. I love that music transcends and that it travels that way.

**What challenges have you faced being a woman in the music industry?** “Often people [in meetings] will initially make eye contact with my male partner, Cliff. They assume he is the one in charge. As the relationship develops, they see it is an equal partnership. I hope they realize that just because you are a woman, it doesn’t mean that you will be in the background.” She says it used to bother her but she recognizes that, “It’s an assumption because he is the guy.”

**Any other dreams for the creative future?** .Carol’s dreams for the future certainly involve music. “I would love to score original music for films. I would love to work with orchestras.”

**Any words of wisdom for young artists?** “If you love it, stick with it. Don’t let anyone change you or your sound.”



## **Ryan Farley - Drummer**

### **Hit it!**

Playing the drums since he was ten years old, Ryan Farley, was a self-taught drummer. He learned by listening to the sounds of other famous drummers like John Bono and Tony Allen. He soon discovered jazz and reggae, introducing him to new time accents and rhythms. At the age of thirty, Farley decided to start studying with a jazz drummer.

### **Let’s Play Together**

Having been with the band since its inception ten years ago, Farley has certainly enjoyed the ride. “We have traveled to many countries, most of which I probably would never have seen. It's great to go to a new place and perform there, be in the thick of it. Experience it from the inside. We get to find out the scoop on the local places to go and what to do.”

We also chatted about practicing and connecting as a group. Farley said, “Practicing is really important. The more you play together, the more you know each other's styles and ways. The more natural it becomes.”

*“Playing the drums has always been my form of meditation.”*

**What flavor do you think you bring to the group?** “Definitely reggae, hip hop and afro beat too. I love off-beat rhythms.”

**Words of wisdom to young musicians?** “Never stop playing and learn the different aspects of the business. Even if you never have mega success and fame, you will always have the experience of it.”



## **Nicole Arena - Violinist**

### **Playing the Strings**

At seven years old, Nicole Arena began playing the piano although she always had her eye on the violin. At the age of ten, her parents gave her that wish. They saw she was committed to learning and supported her with lessons and a violin. “The violin is very controlled, although I have learned to be more open and expressive. It's difficult because the violin is seen as a reserved instrument because of its association with classical music.”

## Making the Band

Arena's experience with Si\*Se began by watching them in the audience at their shows. Her sister introduced her to the group when she was a teen, knowing she would be inspired by the many live instruments included in their shows. Eventually, when the group needed a new strings player they thought of her and offered her the spot. She has now been with them for about 3 years. Why she loves her role? "I love to share in playing music together and feeling the energy of the band."

*"I love to share in playing music together and in feeling the energy of the band."*

**Words of Wisdom when you are the "new kid"?** "No matter what you may have accomplished in your life, anything that is new can feel overwhelming. Don't go into thinking you know it all. Hear the advice of others. Don't hide who you are either, just know the balance. Recognize your talents and strengths while allowing others to teach you too."

**What do you see in your future?** "I hope it's ever-changing. I would love to teach and still be playing music. Honestly, I would be happy doing anything that makes me feel accomplished."



## Morgan (Morg Rock) Phillips - Bass Player

Bass player, Morg Rock, enjoys playing for the band, but doesn't see his part as so important. He questions my desire to interview him, mentioning the bass is a small part of the overall sound of Si\*Se. He further jokes that a keyboard can easily replace him.

His personal style of music is a lot “harder” than what he plays on stage. “My style of music is more like The Misfits, not soft.” He goes on to say that he craves more challenges with his work and his music.

### **Don't Toy with Him**

What is Morg Rock up to when he is not busy playing bass for Si\*Se? “I have a factory in China Town where I make molds and design little, bad effed up action figures. I base them on whatever I am interested in at that moment. I like mocking people and things, sex, drugs, and other scenarios. I make them and people spend a lot of money on them.

### **Fashion Games**

Proving my notion that Morg Rock secretly loves playing the unimpressed rockstar, he slips on his hot pink shades mid-interview. This provokes me to ask, “Tell me about your sense of style.” “It all comes from thrift shops, Kmart...some pieces are hand-me-downs.” He proclaims it “fashion magic.”

*“It gets harder (music business) as you get older. Time flies.”*

### **Any words of wisdom for young bands?**

“Work harder than we do, and produce a lot of music. You have to keep publishing music constantly. It gets harder (music business) as you get older. Time flies.”



### **Cliff Cristofaro - Producer**

#### **The Crystal Pharoah**

Cliff Cristofaro's musical start began in college where he hosted a radio show at the school's radio station. He predominately played old skool hip hop (introduced to him by his brother) and experimented with sharing records across the airwaves. He also began interning in the city with various record labels, where he began gathering all the free music that surrounded him.

Interestingly, after graduation he worked for a government television station where he covered

press conferences, political leaders and stories of legislative interest. This is where he met Hector, a gentleman who would eventually become Si\*Se's first manager. Hector overheard Cliff experimenting with music and was intrigued by what he was doing. He mentioned he knew this singer Cliff should meet, that they would have a great musical connection. Soon after, Hector introduced the pair and that's where the group's musical journey began.

Cliff and Carol began sending each other cassette tapes full of music. They shared their favorite songs, beats Cliff was working on and Carol's acapella vocals. Back and forth these tapes went. Cliff was completely intrigued by Carol's voice and how she layered her Spanish lyrics over his beats. He didn't understand what she was singing, but heard her voice as an instrument. "We actually began recording music in my closet," Cliff recalls.

### **In the Beginning**

At first it was just the two of them, but back then, a DJ/singer combo was not "in." "A band was almost expected, a performance was expected. The record companies wanted to know how our sound would translate visually and that's when they decided to start a band." Instead of putting out an ad, for random musicians, they decided to reach out to their friends who were musicians. "It was great how everyone was on the same level, trying this thing out called the music industry for the first time. It was fresh place to start," confesses Cristofaro.

### **Creating their Sound**

Cristofaro began producing music when Si\*Se first formed, a little over ten years ago. "It was truly my first experience producing. Our music is heavily influenced by the city we all grew up in, New York." From El Gran Combo to hip hop, Cristofaro became open to various sounds. He also recognized Carol's Latin influence, her language, her ethereal melodies, and her love of percussion and traditional rhythms. "I take the influences we love and find a place for them. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. It's all about knowing what to keep."

*"The real desire to is be cultivated as artists not changed."*

**How do you maintain creative control while still putting yourself out there?** "To be honest, we are still figuring it out. Working with record companies can be really tricky. They want a specific musical package. They need to place you on a shelf in a store, find a place for you. Our sound is so broad. dub, drum and bass, electronica, hip hop, latin, funk, all in one album."

**Any words of wisdom for someone who wants to produce music?** "If you want something, you can do it, even without the proper training. It helps, but it's not always 100% necessary. I am not making a living from what I initially went to school for." He says, "Be eager, be hungry, and get your foot in the door. You have to get in there and test your skills."

