**AISHA BARROW**

*by Ric Taylor, View Magazine, Issue Feb 7 to 13, 2019*

During my hunt for cool gigs around town, I noticed that the Artword Artbar is offering a lot of interesting shows this month, particularly with a focus on Black History month. While you can check out the Riddim Riders annual celebration of Bob Marley this weekend at the Casbah, they also perform a special acoustic set next weekend at the Artword Artbar.

Originally billed as a CD release party, a show this weekend offers a chance this week to speak with up and coming singer, songwriter and producer Aisha Barrow. Born in Saudi Arabia, but hailing from The Republic of Gambia, a young Aisha Barrow would come to Guelph when her father found employment in that city but it was when Barrow decided to make music that she came to Hamilton to study jazz in Mohawk College’s Music Program. Taking influence from her own roots as well as western pop influences like Ed Sheeran, Fall Out Boy, Fun., Travis Garland, Kool And The Gang and more, Barrow’s music is an interesting take on neo-soul.

“Beyoncé and Janet Jackson are also in my list of influences – any artist that really puts on a performance is who I’m truly inspired by,” says Barrow. “I’m also influenced by traditional Gambian music or Mande Pop and I blend that with soul and R&B. After I realized that music was my true calling, I went to Mohawk and after four years, the goal is to enter the field of music, recording my own songs and releasing an EP.” You can find Barrow’s music on a variety of streaming services currently but a physical CDEP should be out by the end of next month.

“I was listening to a lot of artists like Erykah Badu, Maxwell and Lauren Hill and I was in that kind of space so “Better” ended up being a neo–soul song with my Mande Pop vocals which is a deeper, richer female tone,” she offers on the track available on Spotify. “Most of my songs I’ve recorded in my home studio but “Better” was produced with the help of a Korean producer. I think we did a very good job on it. We’re hoping to have a full–length album ready by the end of the summer.” While her life and music has been cosmopolitan, Barrow has come into her own musically with her time in Hamilton and since graduating last year, is putting her focus into ingratiating herself into the local scene.

“The Hamilton music scene is really expanding now and there’s all of this room for all kinds and types of artists,” says Barrow. “Other artists have been so helpful for including me in their shows and sets, helping me to navigate, so I have a lot of love for this city. Hamilton is where I’ve been growing up as a musician. “Black History month is my favourite month of the year,” she adds. “It’s very evident I am a black woman and that’s something that plays a role in my music so my sound comes historically from black people and I always want to represent that in a way. It’s always noted and evident but I hope that people of any colour and creed can enjoy my music. Representation is so important but Hamilton does a pretty great job of that, although there’s always room for improvement. I’m always looking for venues that are open to all styles and types of sounds and all colours and races of people.” With the Artword Artbar being welcoming, this weekend Barrow spearheads an all–female show that takes influence from hip hop as well as soul and incorporates her alter ego, the Life and the Tribe for a full band showcase.

“My name in Arabic stands for ‘she who lives’ so that’s where that part comes from and the Tribe is all of the people who have helped me get to this point,” explains Barrow on the Life and the Tribe moniker. “The idea for this show is to highlight women in the R&B scene, I was waiting for a show like this to happen but since it hadn’t, I decided to create one. The Cypher comes from hip hop where a lot of rappers will come together and support each other with showcases and battles and that’s the energy I wanted for this show. We have a group of women to support each other and showcase our talents in Hamilton."

“I’ve seen Julianna Jones [perform], I went to school with her and she has an amazing voice. I want more people to see her. Victoria Csik has been performing around Hamilton for a little bit and she’s got a really cool vibe that would complement this show as well,” adds Barrow. “She needs to be heard so I contacted her to be a part of this as well. I’ll have my band with me, Nathanael Pollard keys; Jason Osario guitar; Spencer Devolin bass; Jadon Haughton drums — they’re some of my favourite people in the entire world and they’re all Mohawk College music students."

"It’s an EP release party without the gravitas of an EP release — since the songs are out there for people to consume — the songs are now available for this show but CDs will be available in mid–March. If you come, you can expect a full bodied show full of R&B music with my Mande Pop stylings and I think your mind will be blown. Our job is to get you to move so there will be a chill element to it but my main goal is to get people to get up and dance”

**LifeandtheTribe and Viktoria Csik present The SoulCypher on February 8 at the Artword Artbar with Julianna Jones. Doors open at 8pm and $10 gets you in. Click on lifeandthetribe.com**