

Richard Stirton releases 'Middle Ground'

 By [Pasqua Heard](#)

10 Oct 2016

Richard Stirton, winner of [The Voice South Africa 2016](#), released his first album 'Middle Ground' on Friday 7 October. This album ventures beyond Stirton's comfort zone when it comes to his traditional sound and aims to make people move with its mix between deep and upbeat music.

On first impressions, one may think that Stirton fits the alternative rock look with his shoulder-length hair, however, he can't be limited to any particular stereotype. The 22-year old musician is amicable, sincere and humble in the way that he's quick to commend and learn from other musicians.



Image by Canton Parker

Having had a few disappointments, such as “being fired from the Barnyard Theatre after one show for not being able to dance”, as well as not making it through to the TV round of Idols, Stirton pursued a Business degree at UCT, but swiftly made the leap back to music and subsequently fame.

 ***Tell us about your background and how you got into music.***

The first time I performed on stage alone was in my school cabaret when I was 17. I loved it, but focused more on my sport at that point.

I joined Stardust during my gap year in 2014, after having studied Business Science in the previous year. Stardust is a melting pot of talent and I owe a lot to that place. I learnt everything from what the other employees said. A lot of them had been doing music for years and some had been vocal coaches. It's cool to take certain things you admire from other artists and apply it to yourself.

▣ ***What bands do you most enjoy?***

I've been binge watching 21 Pilots. I also love Matt Corby, but mainly his old music. Then there's Amber Run and Bon Iver.

As for local bands, I loved Just Jinger and Prime Circle when I was growing up. Jeremy Loops is also amazing. He manages to translate his message into his music very well.

▣ ***How has The Voice prepared you for your musical career?***

It gave me perspective. For instance, after singing on stage on live TV to up to one million people, it's chilled for me to stand on stage now.

It was also helpful to have coaches who shared their wisdom and their belief in me.

It's a difficult industry, everyone knows that, so I just tried to learn what I could from others. Karen Zoid had some amazing things to say; Kahn helped me a lot; Lira is a phenomenal businesswoman; and Bobby van Jaarsveld is a legend. They all brought something different to the party. Then there were other contestants who inspired me too, such as Zoe Modiga, a phenomenal jazz vocalist. I'd love to collaborate with her one day.



Image by Canton Parker

❑ ***What was it like being coached by Kahn Morbee from The Parlotones while you were on The Voice?***

It's the weirdest thing, you know! We're playing at Kirstenbosch on 11 December together and the first Kirstenbosch concert I ever went to watch was Kahn's.

Working with him is amazing. He genuinely cares and he's the most down-to-earth guy you could ever wish to meet. Even after the show, he didn't have any obligation to help me, but I had several coffees with him where he gave me advice. I also played three shows with him after The Voice.

He gave me this helpful advice: "Less is more. Don't oversell yourself."

❑ ***How have things changed since being on The Voice?***

The Voice was a competition where I was doing covers, whereas now it's about identifying myself as a brand and someone people can associate with. The Voice is an amazing platform, but one in which there are many seasons, so people forget the artists quickly. I want to establish a musical career and not just be "that dude from M-Net".



❑ ***Tell us about your recent single 'Break the Silence'.***

I love quiet. One of the most amazing things I ever did was go on a White Rhino Trail in Umfolozi when I was in grade 11. That is the epitome of silence and you just realise when you're sitting there watching elephants walking through the reeds that they're doing that quietly every day while the world goes on around them. I realised it's so easy to get lost in the noise of everyday life.

Go and listen to a song called 'Car Radio' by 21 Pilots. The song talks about the fact that people can't deal with quiet and introspective thinking.

So, 'Break the Silence' is about being in the quiet and breaking the silence not necessarily with your voice, but by just being there.

■ ***Did you write your own songs on this album?***

It varied. We had three weeks to record this album, so I've luckily been able to write three and a half songs. We also did co-writes, two covers and then some of them are sourced. We changed some of the lyrics and core progressions in the sourced songs, so they became more personal and more of a co-write.

■ ***What inspired the album name, 'Middle Ground'?***

The concept is about finding a happy medium or middle ground between commercial sensibility and my alternative, emotive sound. The aim is for the album to be a banger on radio, but also something that, when stripped down to its core, has an impactful message and has longevity.

■ ***What plans do you have for your music career in the future?***

Ed Sheeran said: "You don't want to put a ceiling on anything." So, I'm just trying to believe in myself and see where it goes. I want to play locally at Rocking the Daisies and Oppi Koppi, but I also want to perform abroad.

Download "Middle Ground" on [*iTunes*](#)
www.facebook.com/Richard-Stirton

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