

THE GUIDE



Clubs

Word from the Street



PAGE 11

Music



Acoustic Festival is expanding PAGES 2-3



Arts

Strictly duo: Why it's our very Last Tango

PAGE 5

Food

Dawn Collinson gets a taste of New York at Bretta & Co

PAGES 6-7

Games



McDroid raises the bar for tower defence games PAGE 13



Alexandra Burke on fame, nerves, life after the X Factor ... and her new role in The Bodyguard at the Empire

Stepping into Whitney's shoes

SEE PAGE 4

INTERVIEW

JUST like her heroine Whitney Houston, Alexandra Burke comes from good musical stock, writes Arts Editor Catherine Jones.

Houston, who died in tragic circumstances four years ago, was the cousin of soul legend Dionne Warwick.

And Burke, who rose to fame after winning X Factor back in 2008, is the daughter of Melissa Bell, singer with Grammy Award-winning R'n'B outfit Soul II Soul.

Bell actually worked with Houston during her career.

And now her daughter is taking on the American superstar singer's most famous role - singer Rachel Marron in *The Bodyguard*.

The 27-year-old first played the part in the West End, and this is her second UK tour, but the first time the show has come to Liverpool.

I caught up with her backstage in Manchester earlier this year for a chat about the show, and what it means to play such an iconic role.

■ **Can you explain the story of *The Bodyguard* for the uninitiated?**

The *Bodyguard* was famously done by Whitney Houston and Kevin Costner, and it's all about a massive superstar who's being stalked, and she falls in love with her bodyguard.

And what's great about the theatre adaptation is that we have only used six songs from the actual *Bodyguard* soundtrack, and the rest are all from Whitney's catalogue.

We don't stray too far from the film at all, it's the same storyline. We've tried to make it a bit more modern, and we try to take the audience through an amazing journey with laughter, love, and emotional times as well.

■ **Tell me about your character Rachel Marron?**

How I play Rachel, she's a complete and utter bitch in the beginning, by the end of act one I would like people to have fallen in love with her.

And half way though I'd like people to see that she's actually a vulnerable woman and just wants to protect her child, and to be loved, and she doesn't realise what's about to face her, the fact that she falls in love with her bodyguard.

■ **Did you have any acting experience before joining *The Bodyguard*?**

I did do acting as a child. That was just at school, and at the Almeida Theatre too, which was nice.

But it got to a point where my mum said to me, you need to choose between singing, dancing and acting, because she said stop trying to be great at all three, be good at one, and the rest will follow. So I chose singing. And dancing of course followed soon after, then acting 10 years later, so it's great.

■ **Do you remember your first night in the West End?**

Prayers help me get over nerves



Alexandra Burke in *The Bodyguard*

The first night was a complete blur. I also couldn't even speak after the first show because I'd lost my voice. How I even managed to do a second show the next day, I have no idea.

Nobody had forewarned me, but in the dress run you're not meant to sing. So I fully sang the show in the dress run and no one said "hold back, you've got a show tonight".

I just didn't know, it was completely new to me. And I just wanted to impress everyone that I was with, wanted to work really hard and I thought I had the stamina at the time to do it.

I definitely of course did have the stamina, because I completed two shows in one day, but I'd never do it again.

I just do six shows a week, I don't do the matinees.

■ **Do you get nerves at all?**

I do, every single night. But what takes away my nerves is prayer. I always pray before I go on stage, and I make sure that I never go on stage without praying.

One time that I did we had a show stop.

A lot of performers have a thing they do. For some people it's jumping up and down for five minutes, mine is just holding hands with whomever I'm with and praying.

I just think it's important for me because I'm a strong believer in faith, and I'm a massively spiritual person.

■ **You've now signed up to play *Deton8* in *Sister Act*. It looks like the acting bug has bitten.**

Well yes, bitten me in the sense that

I definitely want to do more acting, and I want one more acting challenge before I return to music.

I'm going to use that year of touring to be back in the studio as well to record the third album. So it's more of a building year for me as well as doing another challenge and hopefully enjoying that challenge.

■ **When you won X Factor in 2008, did you have a career plan?**

Not really, I just wanted to keep making music, I didn't think for a second I'd be doing musicals until about the age of 30, and I'm 27 now and I took on this role at 25 and turned 26 during the show.

I just think it's always best to be open-minded. You never know where life is going to take you.

■ **Tell me about kissing your leading man on stage.**

You should have seen me in rehearsals last year, when I was with Tristan (Gemmill - her co-star in the West End), I was just like, I don't want to kiss him, I don't want to kiss him! I didn't know how to stage kiss. I asked Tristan - how do you do it? He said, well there's no tongues. I said, great!

So they just taught me, and Stuart (Reid) taught me as well. I think for me, I just get scared, I don't care who you are, you could be my best mate, I'm not kissing you!

But we've got no choice in this show so you've just got to get on with it.

■ **The *Bodyguard* is at the Liverpool Empire from April 26 to May 7.**