

The Urban Soul Orchestra in the Spotlight

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Britain's unique orchestral group combines vocals with classical music and is quickly growing in popularity in the UK and across Europe.

They are dynamic, sophisticated and culturally diverse. They have recorded with world renowned pop idols including Grace Jones and Mick Jagger and have furthered their expertise from an original string ensemble to work with percussion, bass, DJs and vocals. Luke Kyte catches up with the [Urban Soul Orchestra](#) as they look to build on their continued success.

The background of the Urban Soul Orchestra

Talented musician Steven Hussey founded the orchestra nearly 20 years ago and remains a vital cog in the Urban Soul Orchestra as conductor and composer for one of Britain's most unique orchestral groups.

In 2010, the USO was the official band for the LTA Wimbledon Ball and in November they took to the stage with award winning R&B singer Lemar to switch on the Victoria Christmas lights in London. Just last month the USO was involved with the official launch of the Land Rover Evoque at the London Boat Show and forthcoming events include the opening of One Hyde Park in Knightsbridge.

The USO was also handpicked by Hollywood actress Penelope Cruz to perform at the 2009 Cannes Film Festival and has entertained individuals such as Lord Norman Foster at private functions.

USO manager in the spotlight

Natasha Beckman has been manager of the Urban Soul Orchestra for the past 18 months. She met Stephen Hussey and Nitin Sawhney, an Indian-British musician, producer and composer, in her home country in Auckland, New Zealand, while working as the Visual Arts and Public Programs manager for the Auckland Festival. The 38-year-old describes how the USO has become publically recognised both in this country and around Europe.

She says: "We first entered the public eye to work at events when Oasis asked us to do a string arrangement of their second album to be played by the quartet at the album launch party.

"We were then asked to do a similar event for Mariah Carey and it went from there. Some of the standout recent events include performing at a party hosted by Penelope Cruz at the Cannes Film Festival and playing at Lord Norman Foster's chateau in Switzerland.

"At both events we played our 'DJ Set' (featuring DJ, live strings, percussion, sax and vocals) as we did for our first event for this year on January 7 - launching the new Land Rover Evoque at the London Boat Show.

"Our next event (Jan 19), is launching an exclusive new apartment complex in Knightsbridge, with our Chill Out Set quartet and six-piece acoustic ensemble (string quartet plus percussion and bass)."

What does the future hold for the USO?

After a successful promotional showcase at the London Mayfair Hotel in January, it is almost certain that the USO will have a busy 2011, which will see them begin work on their own album.

"We have been very fortunate to work with some of the top artists in the music industry but now we would like to dedicate time to writing our own material, concentrating on our own album and performing on the festival circuit,"
Natasha says.

"We also still love collaborating with other artists and have begun to work with the London Community Gospel Choir, doing some Christmas Concerts with them late last year, so we hope to continue this partnership in the future."

"The orchestra and in particular our director Stephen have been working very closely with Nitin Sawhney over the last 10 years. Nitin composed and Stephen conducted the score for the new BBC1 series Human Planet, which is currently airing.

"Nitin always has incredibly exciting projects up his sleeve (for example recently scoring music for PlayStation games Heavenly Sword and Enslaved) so no doubt there will be more this year. Last year Stephen conducted the live orchestral performance for "Throw of Dice" (a classic Indian silent film, which Nitin composed the score for) with Nitin and his band in Qatar and Australia."

The USO is also particularly keen to return to a number of stages they visited last year and generate some form of consistency.

Natasha says: "Last year Urban Soul Orchestra were invited to perform our 'Little Big Band' at the LTA Wimbledon Ball and hope to be doing the same again this year.

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