

## YOLA Bio

“It’s a paradigm shift.”

And as simply as that, Yola encapsulates the giddy expansiveness, stunning emotional breadth, and exponential musical growth of her sophomore album *Stand For Myself*, out July 30. She may only be saying four words, but it’s a whole new world.

Everything about the album—musically, lyrically, spiritually—explores the epiphany that making decisive choices leads to freedom. If her critically acclaimed 2019 debut *Walk Through Fire* was an exhilarating exercise in country soul, *Stand For Myself* explores the concept of genre. The album features a fluidity of sound that defies categorization weaving elements of symphonic soul, mellifluous pop melodies, disco grooves, rootsy rawness, and ecstatic gospel power into a package with instant appeal.

For those who fell in love with the singular British artist on *Walk Through Fire*—and the love affair was fierce with both critics and the Recording Academy which recognized Yola with four Grammy nominations—listening to *Stand For Myself* is like stepping out of Kansas into Oz. Home may have been cozy and full of great songs, but it’s time to take the Yola ride in full Technicolor. And there’s no place like *Stand For Myself*.

“The album is like a window into my mind, my life experiences, my politics, my hopeful and sentimental sides, and my hope for humanity at large,” she says of the 12-track collection that covers a wide swath of ground in its 45 minute-plus running time. At her most melodically and lyrically free, it is an album of both artistic freedom and subtle social commentary, that Yola hopes will connect personally with anyone who has experienced being made to feel “other.”

Yola makes exciting new vocal choices on *Stand For Myself*. While her gale force power remains undiminished, she probes the layers of her instrument. “So often people come out all guns blazing and they don’t navigate nuance,” she says of her purposeful vocal approach. “I thought, do you know what? Instead of punching out of the gate with absolutely everything I have, I’m going to really try and navigate nuance.”

The results show themselves in glorious fashion as she pushes herself to both higher and lower registers, modulates her attack with laser-like precision and generally explores new textures on songs like the transporting title track, the addictive “If I Had To Do It All Again” and the slow-burning “Great Divide” which deftly balances grit and light. “The album is like a window into my mind, my life experiences, my politics, my hopeful and sentimental sides, and my hope for humanity at large”

— Yola

Lyrically, she explores the difference between surviving and thriving (the languid R&B soul-searcher “Barely Alive”); inventively imagines new outcomes grappling with mortality (the inventive “Break The Bough”); frolics in the intersection of sentimentality and sexuality (the deeply sensual “Starlight”); recognizes the value of allyship (“Be My Friend” featuring vocal contributions from Brandi Carlile); and takes control of her own destiny on the anthemic title track. In examining and embracing the various elements of her identity: black, female, empathic, creative, erotic, bawdy, sophisticated, curious, intelligent, and more, Yola takes listeners on a journey to self-actualization that they might not even realize they’ve been on until the album ends.

## YOLA Bio

"That's it," she says accompanied by one of her deeply infectious laughs. "I want to trick people into empathy and self-actualization!"

On the title track, she urges the listener to stand for themselves and those around them by challenging biases that fuel bigotry, inequality and tokenism which have deeply impacted her personal life and professional career. "It is about how people continue to bury their heads in the sand to hide from inconvenient truths that create a profound need to change how they think," she says.

Her own journey to Stand For Myself was a somewhat circuitous route, for which, in hindsight, Yola could not be more grateful. As the anniversary of her debut album approached in February 2020, the artist was intended to embark on opening dates in arenas and stadiums with Chris Stapleton, headline and festival gigs, and a journey to Australia to play Sister Rosetta Tharpe in Baz Luhrmann's untitled Elvis biopic starring Tom Hanks as Colonel Tom Parker and Austin Butler as Elvis. Second album recording was to happen sometime in and around all of that. She got in one show with Stapleton before COVID-19 derailed those plans and headed home with an eerie sense of the unknown looming in front of her.

Finding herself in lockdown back in Nashville allowed Yola to have something she hadn't experienced in a year, time. "I wasn't seeing anybody and I was just staying up until five o'clock in the morning until my brain was really fuzzy and hazy and then ideas would just jump out," she says. "I studied my creative process to the point where I knew what kind of state my brain needed to be in to generate ideas and knew what time of day my ideas turn up and so the whole process was 'Okay, I'm going to start writing some things now explicitly for this record.'"

Over the course of some weeks she brought her early morning visions to life, alongside song ideas she had been germinating for the last decade. Pandemic-penned ideas were developed with Joy Oladokun, Ruby Amanfu, fellow Highwoman Natalie Hemby, Bobby Wood, Pat McLaughlin, and more. She headed back into the studio for a week in October 2020 with Walk Through Fire producer Dan Auerbach and a fresh band of collaborators including Dap-King bassist Nick Movshon (Sharon Jones, Amy Winehouse), drummer Aaron Frazer, who plays with Durand Jones and the Indications and is an emerging artist in his own right, and in-demand session percussionist Sam Bacco (Sheryl Crow, Johnny Cash), among others.

The pair got the work done quickly thanks to Yola's own prodigious studio work, her new sense of purpose and the ability to work with a creative partner who understood her in a new way. "Walk Through Fire was a collaboration, in the truest sense of the word," she says of the album that grew out of her personal story of literally and figuratively surviving harrowing experiences that spawned fan favorites like the title track and "Faraway Look." "It was a getting-to-know-you record." She says, "Dan and I talked about the music that we had in common, and then we found that middle ground." After a year of touring, learning, writing, and introspection Yola was able to record Stand For Myself as the person she has known herself to be for years because what wasn't new about the album was her innate sense of self. She wanted to show her

## YOLA Bio

vulnerability, her hope, her intricacies, and to ultimately uncover all of those things for the listener.

"I want people to feel like they know a dark-skinned black woman, a little better," she says. "I could be the first, and all with an English accent and a chocolate bar skin tone. I will be an example of nuance that one can reference that someone might not have had, because the media does not want to portray us in a way that is nuanced."

If, she says, the first record was about introducing a person who, at a low point, recognized the need to ask for help, this second one illuminates that "I've been proven through this fire and I'm back to where I started, the real me. I kind of got talked out of being me and now I'm here. This is who I've always been in music and in life. There was a little hiatus where I got brainwashed out of my own majesty, but a bitch is back."