



Don't stop believing

Photo: Universal Music

Sylvia Ratnel has come a long way since she didn't win *Singapore Idol*

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WHEN we first interviewed Sylvia Ratnel during her days on *Singapore Idol*, the singer seemed a little timid, reticent even, to talk about herself or her aspirations. Quiet and demure, she answered questions almost apologetically, like a shy schoolgirl.

Ten months down the road and, my, look how she has grown.

It was a pleasant surprise to meet the Sylvia Ratnel of today: A confident, self-assured, determined singer. Guess that's what hosting the foodie magazine show, *Buffetlicious*, with Michelle Chia on MediaCorp TV Channel 5 and having a hit radio single out called *Fly* does to a person.

We sat down for a chat during her listening-session-cum-performance to herald her self-titled debut album. Gone was her quiet demeanour — the new and improved Ratnel showed she was made of sterner stuff, like when we asked her how she felt about naysayers complaining

that *Fly* sounds too much like a Christina Aguilera number.

"Why do they complain about it? It sounds like Christina? Well, I'm singing it. So it's definitely me!"

Yes, ma'am.

PROUD NEW 'MUM'

Still, her mood was decidedly upbeat. "I'm very excited," said Ratnel. "This album is like my baby."

Well, we reminded her, it has been about nine months since she started recording. "Oh, yeah! It has, huh?"

"I feel very lucky. I got to work with (producer) Don Richmond, although it didn't really feel like it was work. It was very casual."

Ratnel said this relaxed atmosphere helped her gain confidence during the recording sessions as well, because even though she *almost* won a national singing competition, the whole singer-pop-star stuff was brand new to her.

"Initially, when I came into the studio, I thought that you had to be really serious for recordings — be really quiet, then when it's time for you to sing, you sing," she said. "So when I first met Don I was so surprised because he was so whacky. Instead of working, I think half the time

we were just cracking jokes."

"Don is very talented and because we have this easy working relationship, it was very fun. But when it comes to work, I will work my butt off," she added. "So it would be, like, joke, joke, then he'd say, 'Okay, let's sing.'"

BARING ALL

On the album, Ratnel reveals her personal side on a song she wrote called *Foolish This Way*.

"Actually, it's very emotional ... It's very slow, very heartfelt, a tearjerker. It's based on my life experience so it's very personal to me," she said.

The 22-year-old has no qualms about baring her soul. "Well, the good thing about it is that I've gotten over the experience so I'm just borrowing the emotions of that experience and putting it into the song. So I have to thank the person for dumping me, I guess!"

"That song is a really nice way to look back and see how much my life has changed since that incident. I'm sure a lot of people have gone through that as well and maybe they can relate to it."

As for what she thinks her fans' reactions might be to the album, she said she didn't harbour any expectations

for it — despite *Idol* champion Sezairi Sezali having released his album a few months ago.

"Hopefully people will like it. If they don't then, er, what can you do? But I've given 110 per cent on this, so I hope that people will appreciate the effort. Because Don and I worked really hard on it. A pat on the back would be nice!"

Her dream for the future is to stage a full-on concert with the whole shebang: Dancers, back-up singers, fireworks, et al. But she knows the road is long with many a winding turn.

"In this music industry, you have to be very tenacious. It's not smooth sailing. There'll be lots of struggles. Luckily for me, I had *Singapore Idol*. It was a really great platform so it really helped boost my career," she said.

"(But) if you want to be a singer in Singapore, you have to prepare yourself mentally for the struggles ahead, like getting rejected and all that. If you believe in your own talent, you shouldn't let others tell you otherwise."

Wise words, indeed, from someone who's more than a girl now, and on her way to being more than a woman.

Sylvia Ratnel is out in stores on Wednesday.