



Passion Play

FOR RACHAEL SAGE, BULLYING, BISEXUALITY AND BROKEN HEARTS INSPIRED HER BRILLIANT MUSICAL CAREER.

BY JESS MCAVOY

RACHAEL SAGE TAUGHT HERSELF TO PLAY THE PIANO AT AGE 3, AND STARTED WRITING SONGS TO COPE WITH BEING BULLIED AT SCHOOL IN CONNECTICUT. SHE DREAMED OF A CAREER IN MUSIC, THEN MADE IT COME TRUE, FOUNDING MPRESS RECORDS, TRAVELING THE WORLD, AND SHARING THE STAGE WITH JUDY COLLINS, SHAWN COLVIN AND SARAH MCLACHLAN. WHEN I CAUGHT UP WITH THE TALENTED AND MULTIFACETED QUEER MUSICIAN, SHE WAS IN PORTLAND, ORE., AWAITING HER SHOW AT THE STAR THEATER. WE DISCUSSED HER POST-BREAKUP ALBUM, *HAUNTED BY YOU*, AND THE CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS OF BEING AN AVID SONGWRITER AND A SUCCESSFUL RECORD LABEL OWNER.

At what point did you know you were a musician?

For me it was really very, very young. I remember being 5 or 6 years old and knowing that I wanted to be a songwriter. I don't know that I thought about what that *was* at the time. But the arrival of the four-track tape recorder as a bat mitzvah gift from my extended family dictated a lack of my social life for a number of years. I guess that was a turning point.

You founded MPress Records in 1996. What inspired you?

I think, for a lot of young people, college is the time where you go through all of your extreme ups and downs, and I think the upside was that I felt really inspired and empowered by the creative community there, and I was seeing a lot of examples of people putting out a lot of creative work—Ani DiFranco, the Indigo Girls and Loreena McKennitt were the reference point for me. I used my acting training to pretend that I had a much bigger staff than just one. I pretended to be this manager, that booking agent—and whoever else I thought could sell the product.

That's pretty ballsy.

It's chutzpah. Sometimes it gets you into trouble, and sometimes you can be lucky.

Running a record label takes a lot of work. What convinced you to do it? How does it affect your own creative career?

I think it was at Lilith Fair in 1999, when I saw Sarah



Blues powerhouse **Ruthie Foster** has been on the road for almost all of 2012 in support of her newly released album *Let It Burn*. After a short break to recharge her batteries, the rest of 2012 will be filled with writing and touring all over the U.S., the U.K. and Norway. "It will be a great 2012" says Foster. Tune in.

1. "My Handy Man Ain't Handy No More" by Alberta Hunter
2. "Shingle by Shingle" by Eric Bibb
3. "Edith and the Kingpin" by Tina Turner
4. "Isn't it A Pity" by Nina Simone
5. "A'al Eih" by Samira Saeed
6. "Amr Diab" by Nour El Ain
7. "Won't Let Me Go" by Amos Lee
8. "Road To Zion" by Damian Marley
9. "I'll Never Love This Way Again" by Dionne Warwick
10. "Bapa" by Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunpingo



McLachlan and the whole operation and how personable everyone in her team was. She made everyone, from the opening act to the headliner, seem equal. That sense of community was what I really wanted to create in some way.

You identify as bisexual. Has this affected your art?

I think that's one of the things that's so empowering about being queer and being a musician, that inescapable understanding that music is something that can bring so many different kinds of people together and open up people's ears and minds to ideas that they otherwise may not be open to—because you are presenting it through art.

Each new record becomes somewhat of a favorite child. Is this how you feel about your milestone tenth album, *Haunted by You*?

You know, it's a favorite and a challenge because I wrote most of the songs on this record on guitar, and I wrote them before I felt entirely comfortable performing them in public. So I am very proud of the nerve it took for me to sit down in the studio and do it until I got it right. I do feel really happy with the record and I am really proud of it, and now that I am on tour it's taking a lot of courage to play these songs in a much more raw kind of way than I would be on the piano, because piano is second nature to me—it's like talking—and guitar is still scary.

Do you have any advice for aspiring musicians or women who are looking to succeed in the business of music?

Stick to your own vision. I think that's the best advice that I've ever received. (rachaelsage.com) ■

Actor **Clementine Ford**, who stole our hearts as the earnest Molly Kroll on *The L Word*, is juggling a few roles including an onstage turn in a Los Angeles production of *Phantoms Go Down* and is working on writing a book, due out next year. "I see music as the foundation of my life," Ford says. "When people ask what kind of music I like, I say 'everything' and I mean it." Listen in!

1. "Perfectly Flawed" by Bat McGrath
2. "I Couldn't Leave You if I Tried" by Rodney Crowell
3. "When You Wish Upon a Star" by Petra Haden and Bill Frisell
4. "Misery and Gin" by Merle Haggard
5. "Connie Francis" by The Centimeters
6. "Comic Strip" by Serge Gainsbourg with Brigitte Bardot
7. "Ashtray Heart" by Captain Beefheart
8. "Earth Died Screaming" by Tom Waits
9. "John the Revelator" by Son House
10. "I Just Don't Know What to Do With Myself" by The White Stripes



LAURA CROSTA (SAGE), FAYE'S VISION/WENN (FORD)