

SHERYL CROW

"It was a very different record to make," says Sheryl Crow of her extraordinary new album, *The Globe Sessions*. "The songs come from a place of real self-examination and reassessment. They're certainly more personal than any I've done before, kind of like standing on stage naked. Musically, the arrangements are more creative than in the past, but it's mainly in laying myself bare that this record takes risks."

From the power of its indelible first single, "My Favorite Mistake," to the harrowing, atmosphere finale, "Crash & Burn," *The Globe Sessions* is Sheryl Crow's deepest, richest music. Horns and strings embellishing tough guitar, drum loops, elegant keyboards and novel percussion, its arrangements serve songs that aim right for the heart. Confessional in impulse, universal in appeal, those songs find Crow communicating with fierce honesty, sharing her soul with rare courage and vulnerability. "What I want is an intimate moment with the listener," she says, and with each of the album's 11 remarkable performances, she achieves that in spades.

"On the road," Sheryl says of the record's genesis, "I'd been assembling pieces for home studio. I wanted the freedom to create whenever I could." Moving to New York a year and half ago, she realized her dream of a perfect work environment. In her own studio, five blocks from home, she set to work on *The Globe Sessions*. To further the creative process, Sheryl produced herself. "It was fun, tough, unpredictable and a mind-stretch in every conceivable way," she says. As always, handling an array of instruments herself - guitar, bass, keyboards from Wurlitzer electric piano to Hammond B-3 - she assembled a stunning cast of players. Guitarist and sometimes co-writer Jeff Trott ("my musical alter-ego," Sheryl says) joined a stellar rhythm section and a handful of aces on strings and horns. Stones fans will recognize Bobby Keyes on sax; Tom Petty veteran Benmont Tench dazzles on piano as does Lia Germano on violin. Wendy Melvin displays the guitar prowess she sharpened on classic Prince albums, and Jay Bennett of Wilco also lends a hand. And, once again, Sheryl Crow proves herself an outstanding vocalist, her singing alternative yearning, defiance, pride and release.

Sheer poetry opens "Riverwide", one of the album's highlights ("I spent a year in the mouth of a whale/with a flame and a book of signs"). "I've only had a few songs that have almost written themselves," Sheryl comments. "This was one of them - it came tumbling out, like a complete sentence. I suspect it will continue to teach me what it's about through the years. It's the kind of song I cling to - it's pure in its incarnation, not at all thought-out." Its drums pure thunder, "Am I Getting Through (Part I & II)" offers a candid self-portrait ("I am ignorant and rude/I am fashionably crude/But sometimes when it's quiet/I'm an angel in white"), then breaks into a high-octane rocker. "The first part is so heavy," Sheryl explains. "And its leaves you hanging. I then thought you needed some comic relief."

"Mississippi," another gem, is a gift from none other than Bob Dylan. "He'd recorded it for his last album," Sheryl says, "but chose not to use it. I was so excited that he thought about me singing it. It's and undeniably brilliant song." Propulsive and edgy ("...let's turn the radio on/this is the meltdown"), "There Goes The Neighborhood" is a surreal character study. Crow says, "My studio's in the meat-packing district, an area filled with Hell's Angels, transvestites and very colorful people. The song's about looking at surfaces and making judgement calls. Sadly enough, people do that all the time."

Multi-textured, balancing funky Clavinet with pedal steel, Moog with violins ("I was going for a Mideastern/Appalachian/Bobby Gentry-ish feel," Sheryl says of the string parts), *The Globe Sessions* is steeped in ambience. "I went in with a clear picture sonically of how I wanted the record to feel," Crow says. "I wanted my last record to sound bratty, rough-around-the-edges. This time I wanted the listener to be embraced by the mixes - to move into a very deep and open environment."

For the songs themselves, Sheryl concentrated on the essentials - rhythm, melody, straight talking lyrics, "I wrote mostly on bass," she says. "I'm a keyboard player, and, as such, when I'm writing I don't want to get wrapped up in beautiful chords. That's not what makes great songs. They're about the directness of the lyrics and the arc of the melody. Writing on bass forces me to concentrate on melody. I also wrote a lot in the studio. You close the door on your frenetic life, let go of the reins, and everything you want to do creatively surfaces. I never limit myself, and there's a great freedom in that."

Born in Kennett, Missouri, Crow retains a bond with her small-town roots. "I was home recently," she says. "And with the Allman Brothers on the car radio and the cropdusters over the cotton fields, it seems like a place where time stands

still." Her mother, a piano teacher, and her father, a lawyer, playing trumpet, Sheryl grew up surrounded by music - "at first Top 40 and Fleetwood Mac, the Stones, Van Morrison and Bessie Smith, and finally songwriters like Bob Dylan and Joni Mitchell," she says. Working first, after attending the University of Missouri, as an elementary-school music teacher, she also began her apprenticeship in bands. Setting out at 24 for Los Angeles, she got her break singing backup vocals with Michael Jackson (she'd parlay those skills into gigs with George Harrison, Don Henley, Joe Cocker and Rod Stewart).

But her own vision compelled her further. "Trying to get a record deal," she says, "I was playing everything on piano, while the only females radio was playing were dance oriented artist. It was new for the time. Other female performers were more into a visual presentation and dance music." Signing with A&M in 1991, Sheryl jettisoned her self-titled debut, deeming it too slick. Its follow-up, 1994's multi-platinum Tuesday Night Music Club proved her right. Achieving the #3 chart position and graced with hits like "Strong Enough" and the Grammy-winning "All I Wanna Do," the album established her as a force to be reckoned with. Sheryl Crow (1996) continued the advance. Jewels like "If It Makes You Happy," "Home" and "Redemption Day" saw Crow growing as a songwriter and performer.

After years of hard work, she has arrived, and is recognized as one of today's truly distinctive voices. Non-stop touring and sell-out top-billed shows have increased her stature, as well as selling 13 million records and earning 5 Grammys. Uncompromising, open, unafraid of either sincerity, wit or surprise, Sheryl Crow will continue to make music that comes from within and reaches out - soul music, heart-to-heart.