

VANESSA CARLTON

There's only one thing tougher than making your debut album, and that's recording your first demo. "Making mine was a total nightmare," laughs Vanessa Carlton. "I was 17 and living in Hell's Kitchen, working five days a week as a waitress in lower Manhattan. On the weekends, I'd grab my four-track and make the long drive to my parents' house in Pennsylvania because that's where my piano was. With my father's help, I'd record take after take until four in the morning, determined to capture 'the perfect performance.' Unfortunately, my dog had other plans. Each time I'd get to the end of a good take, he'd ruin it with a *woof*, and we'd have to start all over again."

Carlton smiles a lot these days—and with good reason. She began the year by wrapping up her highly anticipated A&M Records debut, *Be Not Nobody*, an intoxicating blend of earthy sensuality and emotional resonance. Several months before the album was finished, things were intensified by the lead single "A Thousand Miles" and its companion video; a video that garnered early airplay on MTV. "I remember watching it for the first time," recalls Carlton. "I was in the studio and had just taken a break, when someone ran in the room and said, 'you're on MTV!' We put it on and I just stared at the screen. After a few minutes, I just covered my eyes and started to laugh. It seemed so surreal. The night after that, I heard the song on the radio for the first time. It was all so unbelievable."

As if that weren't enough, *Rolling Stone* named Carlton one of the "Top 10 Artists To Watch in 2002." Calling her "a more pop-oriented Fiona Apple," the magazine praised Carlton's "serious formal skills at the keyboard," as well as her ability to keep her songs "busy with classical flourishes, rich voicings and harmonies reminiscent of Tori Amos."

While grateful for the recognition, Carlton could do without the analogies. "It's funny," she says, "You'd never hear Rage Against the Machine compared to Radiohead. But if they were women, they'd be compared all the time. If you're a girl who plays an instrument, you're going to hear the same comparisons over and over, even though every artist has something different to say. I think once people listen to the record, they'll realize I'm just me."

Of course, branding Carlton the next anybody doesn't quite tell her story. To find out who she really is, you have to go back to the pin dot of Milford, Pennsylvania, population 1,104. "Growing up, there was always music in our house," she recalls. "My mother is a piano teacher, and when she was pregnant with me, she made sure to play certain pieces, including lots of Mozart. When I was 2 ½, my parents took me to Disneyland, where I heard 'It's A Small World' for the first time. When we came home, I ran to the piano and picked out the melody note by note. That's how it all began."

Under her mother's tutelage, Carlton was exposed to a variety of composers, including Eric Satie, Mendelson and Debussy. She played often, and quickly developed a versatile and surprisingly sophisticated talent, composing her first piece at age eight. "My mother has been an amazing guiding force in my life," says Carlton. "As opposed to other teachers, who would hit you on the hand and reprimand you for improvising on a classical piece, she gave me the gift of feeling free at the piano and allowed me to express myself. As a result, learning piano never felt like work, and practice was never a chore. That was invaluable in my development as a musician."

Though Carlton continued to hone her craft, she slowly became less interested in playing "Swan Lake" than dancing it. "I became obsessed with ballet," she says. "At 14, I was accepted into the School of American Ballet. I left home and moved into the dorm in Lincoln Center. I enrolled in the Professional Children's School and began a new life. But I was surprised at how strict it was. I had attended a Montessori school when I was younger and wasn't used to such a regimented system. The pressure was intense and the competition was pretty extreme. The first year and a half was okay, because I was still able to grow as an artist despite the environment. But after awhile I couldn't get along with my teachers and it became a disaster. I went from being the best in my class to skipping class. It became too much for me. I felt completely lost."

Frustrated, she submerged herself in music. "There was a dilapidated piano in the kitchen of the dorm and I'd go there to play," she recalls. "At that point, I had never written lyrics before, just pieces of music. But all these songs started pouring out of me and I began writing. I had never thought of myself as a singer or songwriter, but it became really natural and felt so good. In more ways than one, music healed me."

Walking away from her nascent ballet career at age 17, Carlton moved to Hell's Kitchen and took a job as a waitress. She continued to write, and after amassing a gaggle of songs, mustered up the courage to road test them on the New York club circuit. "My father is so great," she says. "He would bring me to open mic nights and push me in the door because I was so afraid. At first, I didn't want people to look at me when I performed because it felt too violating," she laughs. "But I got over that when I saw that they were moved by my playing."

When behind the piano, Carlton is hypnotic to watch, conveying a full vocabulary of emotions through evocative melodies and provocative phrasings. In the lush *Be Not Nobody*, which was produced by A&M Records President Ron Fair, she draws as much from classical music as from classic rock, fusing both with a soulful pop voice that is by turns vulnerable, sultry and raw. Starting with the warm and upbeat vibe of "A Thousand Miles," Carlton takes listeners on a kaleidoscopic journey through sweeping, waltz-like passages ("Ordinary Day"), irresistible pop cuts ("Pretty Baby"), beautifully orchestrated meditations ("Twilight") and sharp slices of amp joy intensity ("Unsung"). Listeners will also be pleasantly surprised by her dark and juiced-up version of the Rolling Stones classic, "Paint It Black."

Commenting on her influences, Carlton says, "There was only classical music allowed in our house and that was fine—I loved it. To this day, I put on classical music whenever I need to relax because it reminds me of home. But my father was a big Pink Floyd fan, and would play *Animals* and *Dark Side of the Moon* in the car. So I have this odd combination of influences that grew to include everything from Mozart, Pink Floyd and Fleetwood Mac to PJ Harvey, Neil Young and Chopin. I like music that allows me to discover something new each time I hear it. That was my goal with this record."

She pauses a moment, then adds, "I'd love to have people feel the way I do when I sit at the piano and play. I can play for hours without realizing how much time has passed. It's always there for me. That's how I used to feel when I danced. You get in this zone where you're so in the moment and so in the melody. I also find that playing the piano intensifies whatever emotion I'm feeling right then and there. It's very spiritual."

When asked what music satisfies that dancing can't, Carlton smiles and says, "With music, I don't have to be silent."

For all media inquiries please contact:

*Dennis Dennehy (310)865-4563 phone/ (310)865-8565 fax
dennis.dennehy@umusic.com*

*Staci Brooks (tour press) - (310)865-4563 phone/ (310)865-8565 fax
staci.brooks@umusic.com*

For all other inquiries please contact:

Interscope Geffen A&M Records

2220 Colorado Avenue, Santa Monica, CA 90404 (310)865-1000

1790 Broadway, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10019 (212)445-3200



