



ROSIE VELA

Rosie Vela is making her recording debut for A&M in some pretty fast company: *Zazu* was produced by Gary Katz, who had guided Steely Dan through every album in their extraordinary career: Donald Fagen and Walter Becker are all over the album, playing keyboards and guitar; and other guest players include guitarists Rick It's an impressive cast -- but most impressive of all is Vela, who wrote and arranged 11 of the material in addition to supplying lead vocals and her own electronic keyboards.

Roseanne Vela was born in Galveston, Texas, and began playing the piano at age six. After 11 years of classical conditioning, Rosie decided rock 'n roll music was what she really wanted to play -- especially after hearing the Beatles, the Doors, Jimi Hendrix and Laura Nyro; artists who defined popular music in the '60s and early '70s. "When Hendrix came along it gave me full range to be a 'creative Martian.' Even now those records are important to me."

Vela moved to Little Rock, Arkansas, in her early teens. It was there, a few years later, that a University of Arkansas photography assistant persuaded her to pose for a few fashion shots. The pictures turned out great; they made their way to a New York agent, and Rosie soon found herself, quite unexpectedly, launched into the high-pressure, high profile world of New York modeling.

"Whatever success I had modeling didn't change me," she says. "From day one, whenever I wasn't working, I was writing and playing keyboards. Instead of going to Studio 54, I'd play, practice and work on new material. I put my money into recording equipment and built a studio in my living room. It was money well spent since it enabled me to record the demos which eventually found their way to Jerry Moss at A&M Records.

It was after she'd signed with A&M that Vela hooked up with producer Gary Katz; they decided what tunes to record and quickly began working. Fagen and Becker agreed independently to appear on *Zazu*; and after working together in the studio for the first time since the *Gauche* album (1979), the pair decided to re-form Steely Dan.

"It was amazing to watch all these musicians work," notes Rosie, "especially Donald and Walter. Most of the songs turned out pretty similar to my own demo versions, but of course, they added some wonderful touches. On 'Tonto,' for instance, Becker added a very percussive keyboard riff that really helped make the song." Donald Fagen plays "blues" synth all throughout "Magic Smile," which is the first single from the LP and a song Rosie calls a new-wave "Green Onions."

Vela's strengths -- sultry vocals, understated melodies, smooth arrangements -- are all well matched by Katz's typically cool, restrained production sound. "These are very personal songs," says Rosie, "and I sang them from the heart. I'm just me." On *Zazu*, "just me is plenty."