

SPOTLIGHT



CASSANDRA WILSON

She listens and lets the songs speak to her—then she makes them her own

CASSANDRA WILSON HAS A SIXTH sense when it comes to finding songs. “They will tell me if they are for me,” she says. “A song tells me that it belongs to me. It has to resonate and have some connection to who I am, who I’ve grown up to be, who I was and will be and who I want to be.” The veteran singer’s latest album, *Silver Pony*, includes several such songs, coming from sources as disparate as Stevie Wonder, Brazilian composer Luiz Bonfá and blues great Charley Patton—as well as Wilson’s own compositions.

Wilson and co-producer John Fischbach elected to use recordings from both the studio and the stage for *Silver Pony*. “It’s taking two different creative circumstances and trying to blend them together,” she says. “The stage is really dynamic and it has so many elements in it that you don’t have in studio recordings. But the studio recordings are great because they allow you to be very introspective. So I thought it would be interesting to weld those two spaces together.”

Wilson was exposed to a variety of genres growing up in Jackson, Miss., including classical music, jazz, R&B, blues

and country. (*Silver Pony* kicks off with the Sigmund Romberg/Oscar Hammerstein II pop standard “Lover, Come Back to Me,” a tune she learned from her mother.) While she is typically categorized as a jazz singer, Wilson finds such labels limiting. “You hear all kinds of music, so why do you have to stay inside the confines of one type?” she says. “I like to say that jazz is a discipline. It’s a way of life. It’s something that you grow into. It’s not just confined to the music.”

Since the beginning of her recording career in the mid-’80s, Wilson has made a point of exploring numerous avenues, from adventurous funk to standards. The 2009 compilation *Closer to You: The Pop Side* rounded up her various covers of rock tunes, including songs by the Monkees, Neil Young and U2, while 1999’s *Traveling Miles* was a tribute to Miles Davis. Wilson is satisfied to perform any song that calls out to her. “It’s really great when, as an artist, you can see the development of a piece and see it move from one place to the next, after the musicians have had time to really absorb the song,” she says. “It’s about chemistry. The music has to happen in the moment.”

—Jeff Tamarkin

DECEMBER 2010 M MUSIC & MUSICIANS MAGAZINE

REGINA SPEKTOR YOKO ONO CAKE BRYAN ADAMS

MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE
Dangerous again

KEVIN EUBANKS
Screen to stage

ANNIE LENNOX
Sweet dreams

KEITH URBAN
Getting closer to the heart
of the matter

AXE ATTACK
ROCK READINESS

INDIE SURVIVAL GUIDE