

NENEH CHERRY

Musical inspiration has been a long time coming for the '80s hit-maker

IT'S BEEN 25 YEARS SINCE NENEH CHERRY'S MEGA HIT "Buffalo Stance" from her debut *Raw Like Sushi* invaded U.S. airwaves, and nearly 18 since she released her last solo album. But the Swedish singer-songwriter is back with a new album, *Blank Project*. "I've been saying I'd do it for 17 years, but it became, 'I need to do this now,'" she says. "It became a lifeline—my mother died four years ago, and I had shut down. So this album is a rebirth of sorts."

Blank Project is a laid-back, rhythmic mix of beat poetry, rap and soul, with hints of EDM courtesy of acclaimed beat-maker Four Tet—aka Kieran Hebden—who produced the album. Brothers



Freddie Skopovnik

Ben and Tom Page of RocketNumberNine served as her backing band, and first single "Out of the Black" features fellow Swedish artist Robyn. But don't assume the star power means Cherry—whose stepfather was the late American jazz musician Don Cherry and half-brother is Eagle-Eye Cherry—is riding any coattails.

"I don't ever say, 'If I do this, it would be good for business.' If I did, I'd probably be a lot more successful," says Cherry, 49. "It was about wanting the music to be the best it can be. Of course, there's always the hope you'll find new fans, and working with those artists means reaching an audience that was barely born when my debut came out."

Cherry is no stranger to collaboration. She's appeared on recordings by Peter Gabriel, Gorillaz and Groove Armada, and credits experimental jazz group the Thing on 2012's *The Cherry Thing* for helping her new set come to fruition. She started writing songs for *Blank Project* three years ago, but it took just five days to

record in a studio near Woodstock, N.Y. "Recording with the Thing helped me come back to life," she says. "We made *The Cherry Thing* very quickly, and the energy I experienced working that way carried over to *Blank Project*. In the past I've spent days going over a verse. Letting go of that gave these new songs intensity, making them feel more personal or even slightly unhinged. I felt alive doing it like that."

As for the music that put her on the map 25 years ago, she says, "They were important songs for me. I love them, but they're part of the past. They're not something I want to recreate. But I'm glad I had those babies."

So don't expect to hear "Buffalo Stance" when she tours the States this spring—and don't expect another 18-year gap between albums. "After taking my time, I'm now the polar opposite. I want to hold onto this and make some more music really soon."

—Katy Kroll

