

## SPOTLIGHT



Greg Allen

## MINDI ABAIR

**A diverse group of collaborators showcases this sax star's versatility**

THE LAST FEW YEARS HAVE BEEN quite a ride for Mindi Abair. She was the featured saxophonist on *American Idol* in 2011 and 2012. She toured with Aerosmith the same year, and hit the road with E Street Band drummer Max Weinberg—including one night when the Boss himself sat in. She also contributed to Dave Koz's *Summer Horns* in 2013 with fellow ace saxophonists Koz, Gerald Albright and Richard Elliot (which received a Grammy nomination this year). All these experiences were distilled into her new record, *Wild Heart*.

"I've had these incredible opportunities," says Abair. "You want to use that inspiration to further your own art. You stand in front of 50,000 people with Aerosmith sweating and bleeding for their audience and giving everything. I thought, 'Why can't you do that on a saxophone record—play with that kind of abandon?'"

Alongside Abair's pop-jazz inclinations, the album encompasses blues, R&B and '50s-style rock 'n' roll—textures she achieved by including a powerhouse lineup of guests including Gregg Allman, Joe Perry, Booker T. Jones, Keb' Mo', Max Weinberg, Waddy Wachtel and Trombone Shorty. Abair also wrote with Jim Peterik, co-founder of the Ides

of March and Survivor, whose hits include "Vehicle" and "Eye of the Tiger," respectively.

"I knew I had to write differently for this record, so I brought in some friends to help. Jim Peterik and I wrote "Amazing Game," which has Trombone Shorty playing with me. Jim co-wrote "Train" with me, too, and we ended up writing about change. That became a theme—this record is about change. You can be fearful of it, but change is inevitable for all of us. I wanted to embrace it," she says.

Change isn't a new concept for Abair. Before moving to the jazz world, the Florida native cut her teeth with pop artists such as the Backstreet Boys and Duran Duran. "I didn't try to make a jazz, rock or soul record," says Abair, 45. "I just set out to make music that really inspired me—music I could play with that same abandon and energy. I was lucky that a lot of the guys I was working with came and helped me out. That didn't hurt a bit!"

Like many songwriters, Abair channeled life experiences into music and lyrics. "A record should be a snapshot of where you're at in your life," she says. "That's honesty in your music. It's having your music reflect what you're dealing with—whether that's love, loss, or extreme coolness!"

—Linda Laban

