

## Q&amp;A



Amy Ray, Emily Saliers

Frank Ockenfels 3

## INDIGO GIRLS

Decades after their first hit, they're still close—and even closer to fine

ALTHOUGH IT'S BEEN 26 YEARS SINCE the Indigo Girls scored with their 1989 folk-rock hit "Closer to Fine," the Georgia-based duo—Amy Ray and Emily Saliers—has never stopped making music. In fact, their longest hiatus between studio albums—four years—ended with the release of their latest, *One Lost Day*. "At this point we know what will work for an Indigo Girls album," says Ray. "At the same time, producer Jordan Brooke Hamlin worked differently than any other producer we've used—probably because she's from a generation that operates in the digital realm. No matter what though, we always put the songs before anything else."

### Secret to the Indigo Girls' longevity?

Emily and I are opposites—it's cliché, but I live in the country and she lives in the city. But we have a lot of respect for each other, and we're fans of each other's music. What we have is special, so we try to protect that and not let egos get in the way. Plus we write separately, which helps.

### At what point do you work together?

Just to arrange songs when we're working on an album. When it's time to make a record,

we just feel it. This time we really felt it, because it's been four years since our last album. So when we both were ready, we started sending MP3s back and forth. Then when we get together, we write out the chord chart and lyrics for each other. Sometimes we work on the harmony first, sometimes the instruments. The melody and lyrics are done, so there's not a lot of fiddling around with those. But we might move around a chorus or a bridge and tighten things up.

### Do you play around with who sings what?

(Laughs) We should! I've always thought it would be cool to write for Emily's voice. But we typically stick to our own songs because we write in our own vocal range. Emily's voice is higher, so that's one thing that dictates who sings what. Another is that when you write lyrics, you want to sing them—for emotional or sentimental reasons.

### How do you feel about "Closer to Fine"?

It's so old! But we still love it. Emily wrote it, but I never get tired of it. It's fun to play live because the audience always sings, and it's nice to have one song that anchors things. Even if you play a festival where people think

they've never heard you before, you play that song and they'll go, "Oh yeah, I know this." It's that kind of song.

### Ever feel pressured to create another hit?

Not pressure that anyone puts on us, but we're aware of the business and that it would be good if we had a new hit. It would give us momentum and further diversify our audience. When a lot of different people hear your single, it rallies your core audience and engages people who may not be familiar with what you've done in the past, hopefully encouraging them to seek out your new music. But it's not the be-all and end-all for us.

### Thoughts on the state of women in music?

Women make strides and then there's a backlash, which happens over and over. Women always seem to be the exception to the rule. And that's possibly because the mainstream gatekeepers are still predominantly old white men, and it's going to be a while before they die off. (Laughs) I'm sorry, because a lot of them are my generation. But I think the younger generation will move things in a different direction.

—Katy Kroll

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