



Andrew Yee

# ADELE

**For a British singer coming into her voice, a bad habit leads to a great discovery**

SMOKING IS BAD FOR YOUR HEALTH, but it can be good for your musical education—just ask Adele. During her U.S. tour following her breakthrough 2008 album, *19*, the Grammy-winning British singer wound up spending a lot of time with her Nashville-based bus driver. “I used to have to smoke at the front of the bus, and I would

stay up there with him for a 10-hour drive sometimes,” she explains. “He was playing all this amazing country music that he was born and bred on—but that I’d never heard of.” She found new inspirations to join her idols, Etta James and Billie Holiday. There was Garth Brooks, Alison Krauss, Lady Antebellum—and especially Wanda Jackson. “Oh god,

I love her!” declares Adele (*née* Adkins). “She has this feistiness that you’re either born with or you’re not.”

After Adele returned to London, she sequestered herself in her flat listening to country music—and another intriguing new influence. “I really got into hip-hop,” she says. “I was truly fascinated by Jay-Z, Nas and Kanye West and how they manipulate words and make the most mundane thing so exciting you almost explode.” She brought elements of all her new musical interests into her new sophomore set, *21*. Like *19*, the album’s songs are built around a crumbling relationship, rendered all the more heartbreaking by her incandescent tenor. Having written most of *19* solo, for *21* she collaborated with tunesmiths like Dan Wilson and OneRepublic’s Ryan Tedder. “I embraced the fact that I can’t do it on my own anymore,” she says. “Now I find that certain types of writers or producers bring out different sides of me.”

Among the producers who contributed to *21* was Rick Rubin, whose reputation for working from a distance worried her at first. “I started panicking, because I had no idea what I wanted to sound like yet,” she recalls. “I started thinking, ‘Hell, I’ve picked a bloody producer who’s not going to be there.’ And then he proved everyone wrong. He was more involved than anyone else I’ve ever worked with.” Rubin left her with an important lesson: All that matters is the song. “The kind of glitter that goes on a record after it’s done is completely irrelevant to Rick,” she says. “The video, the styling, the remixes, he couldn’t care less. In a world that is so obsessed with trends, it was an honor to make a record like that.”

—Melinda Newman

