

Q&A



Patrick Swirc

MARIANNE FAITHFULL

A legendary rock chanteuse talks sad songs and horror stories

YES, SINGER, SONGWRITER AND actress Marianne Faithfull's 1964 breakthrough hit "As Tears Go By" was written by the Rolling Stones' Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. Yes, she and Jagger dated throughout the late '60s. No, she doesn't want to talk about it. "I don't even mention their names," she says. "Those people are written out of my picture." Today the picture includes her 19th and latest solo album, *Horses and High Heels*, recorded in New Orleans with producer Hal Willner. It's an eclectic set of intimate originals and well-fitted covers featuring guest turns from Lou Reed, Dr. John and MC5 guitarist Wayne Kramer. The London native, 64, spoke to us from Paris, where she's lived for the last eight years.

Do you consider your songs dark?

I find it easier to write drama and sad songs and horror stories. There are a lot of jingle writers who can turn out happy pap for years. But writers like Nick Cave or PJ Harvey [who co-produced 2003's *Before the Poison*] don't tend to write happy little jingles. It's hard work. Obviously it would be absurd if I did a whole record of entirely happy songs,

partly because I'm so good at the dark side. I find writing my own to be much harder work. If you ask Nick to give you a rundown of my faults, he'd say, "She's incredibly talented, but she's very lazy and needs a kick up the ass."

Did Hal help choose songs?

He did. There were a lot of arguments as to what should be the finished product, huge rows—the usual making of a record. (*Laughs*) He and I adore each other, so we're used to it. When we're not working he's my dearest best beloved. When we are working I'm terrified of him. This was one of the most exciting recordings since we started together.

What does the title refer to?

Oh, it's nothing. It's absurd. It's to make me laugh. The cover art is really kitsch, absolutely lighthearted. I miss psychedelia, and this is my version.

Why record in New Orleans?

We wanted all that beauty, a nice time and good food. And we wanted [bassist] George Porter Jr. He's a very old friend from way back.

How were the guests recruited?

Hal brought in Lou Reed, although Lou is a great friend of mine. Dr. John is also a great friend. Wayne Kramer has become my new best friend. He's been on tour with us in Europe. Plus we're going to write together.

Do you have a backlog of songs?

I have a backlog, but I also have a deadline. At the moment I've got plenty of time, but I'm starting to put things together. I would like to write more songs on the next album than I did on this one. It seems that fans are really keen on my songs. They like to get little windows into me.

Any regrets?

I've been overshadowed by certain people, and I've been held back by certain people, and "screw 'em" is all I can say. It'll all come out in the wash. My main thing is music. I love acting because I love playing other people, but music has saved my life.

What are your goals?

I'd like to make a garden. Apart from that, just music.

—Jeff Tamarkin

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