

## VANESSA CARLTON

### A remarkable coincidence puts a singer-songwriter's artistic frustration on the run

WHEN IT CAME TO FINDING THE PERFECT COLLABORATOR for Vanessa Carlton's fourth album, *Rabbits on the Run*, all it took was one fortuitous bonfire—and some especially potent vodka. Carlton attended an outdoor party at friend KT Tunstall's England home, where she was staying as a guest. A fan of producer Steve Osborne's work with acts like Peter Gabriel, the Doves and Tunstall herself, Carlton asked her pal if she knew how to get in touch with him. Tunstall responded by pointing to a man standing several feet away.

"It was one of those coincidences that's so strange, you don't even know what to say when you see the person," recalls Carlton.



Branley Gurnez

"Plus I'd been drinking that night. Honestly, I'm still embarrassed by what I said. I immediately went into my vision for the album—talking about this sort of haunting, 'zombie choir that lives in the woods' sound. It was a bunch of non sequiturs, and he looked at me like I was a complete crazy person." Osborne trusted in Carlton's sanity, asking her to come to Gabriel's nearby Real World Studios to play him her new material.

The fact that Carlton had songs to play at all was remarkable, as the singer, songwriter and pianist best known for 2002's smash "A Thousand Miles" had just spent the preceding two years battling a severe case of writer's block in the midst of personal turmoil. "Not being able to create anything while you're suffering was confusing to me," Carlton says. "At the same time I was going through things that anyone can relate to. There was a lot of stuff within my family that was really difficult, and it just made for a very unstable feeling.

I was relying on people in my life, and when those things fall away it's very tricky to figure out what's going on."

"London," the morose third track from *Rabbits*, was the first complete song Carlton wrote after months of tinkering with instrumental pieces. "It's definitely reflective of that super-dark period I was swimming through," she says. "But there's a moment in the bridge where it says, 'Wait for it, wait for it! That's the little glimmer of light. My synapses started firing again, and I became very energized about what I was going to do next and what songs were coming." Now that her painful journey is complete, Carlton feels fortunate to have the sonically rich *Rabbits on the Run* to show for her struggle. "It's been incredibly restorative," she says. "I'm extremely proud and humbled by this record. Now I understand why I'm doing this: I want to connect."

—Jesse Thompson

