

SPOTLIGHT



Reed Rolls

# MICHELLE BRANCH

Country turned to pop when Nashville frustration gave way to London inspiration

MICHELLE BRANCH IS HANGING UP her cowboy hat for now. Even after she stormed the country charts in 2006 as half of hit duo the Wreckers, Branch's own planned solo country effort was met with years of record-label delays. The frustration motivated Branch to return to her roots with *West Coast Time*, her first pop record in eight years. "It was kind of sucking the life out of me," says Branch of the unreleased country album, *Everything Comes and Goes*, from which an EP was finally released digitally last year. "I needed to get as far away as possible from it to spark some creativity again. I packed my bags and was like, 'Get me to London, get me with people I've never met or worked with. I want a clean slate.'"

An essential part of Branch's fresh start came in the form of British songwriting team Jim Irvin and Julian Emery. Branch tracked them down after hearing their work with folk-pop singer Lissie. "Every time I turned on the TV in Europe I would hear her song, 'When I'm Alone,' and I was just like, 'Who produced this? Who wrote this?'" she recalls. Branch, Irvin and Emery wrote the majority of *West Coast Time* together in London late last year.

Branch credits her Nashville stint with a newfound focus on lyric writing—although growing up has something to do with it, too. She was a teenager when she first found success with 2001's multiplatinum *The Spirit Room* and won a Grammy for her Santana collaboration "The Game of Love." "Some of the songs on my first record I originally wrote when I was 14," says Branch, now 28. "It was just me daydreaming, writing fictional ideals about what I thought life and love were about. Ten years have passed, and now I'm a wife and mother and have seen the world."

If her outlook has changed, her methods haven't—she still finds that inspiration strikes when she least expects it. "I'm the laziest songwriter in the world," Branch says with a laugh. "My favorite way to write is when it falls in my lap. When I'm just cleaning the house, a melody will pop in my head and change into a lyric. Before you know it I'm writing verses down on whatever piece of paper is around. Songs that fall from the sky like that are the songs people connect to, the songs that end up being people's favorites."

—Amanda Farah

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