

Q&A



MARTHA WAINWRIGHT

Family love and loss provides inspiration for her new album

MUSIC HAS ALWAYS BEEN A FAMILY affair for Martha Wainwright. She's the daughter of Loudon Wainwright and Kate McGarrigle, niece of Anna McGarrigle, sister to Rufus Wainwright, and wife of bassist Brad Albetta, who plays in her band. It's no surprise that family changes—the birth of her son, Arcangelo, followed months later by the death of her mother in early 2010—impacted her latest album, *Come Home to Mama*, which includes “Proserpina,” the final song written by McGarrigle. “It made sense to keep it familial,” says Wainwright, 36, who lives in Brooklyn. She also enlisted producer Yuka Honda and guests including Sean Lennon, Jim White and Nels Cline.

What inspired an electronic approach?

I thought I was going to write introverted solo voice and guitar music. When I finally got to it, a lot seemed angry, some was funny, and some was sad—but also kind of apocalyptic and weird. I realized the record was asking for more production and more keyboard-based stuff. Often when you do acoustic music and add instrumentation, you get into Americana or alt-country world—and that didn't seem representational of these songs.

Why did you choose Yuka Honda to produce this record?

It was actually my husband's idea. We usually make our records, but this time we didn't want to because we were going to kill each other. We've been through a lot: homeownership, child, family tragedy. And he's sort of been the punching bag for these songs. I also wanted something more programmed, more soundscapey, and thought Yuka was perfect for that. I wanted her to take charge and do stuff that I wouldn't have thought of doing.

Did you know your collaborators?

The person who was the major coup was Nels Cline, Yuka's husband. I had said to Yuka, “Oh, maybe we should get Marc Ribot,” because I know that she'd worked with him. And she's like, “Yeah, but we can also get my husband.” I was like, “Oh God, now we have to work with Yuka's husband!” I didn't really know who he was! I was like, “OK! Whatever!” And then I came back one morning and there were 15 Nels Cline tracks. It was great—every time he was off the road with Wilco and wanted to spend

any time with Yuka, he was forced to play on my album.

You chose to include “Proserpina.”

I wanted to record it before anyone else did, including my brother. My mother had performed it once at Royal Albert Hall, and it was really moving. I just thought that it was kind of my mother's last gift to me, although I'm sure that it was also a gift for Rufus, too. I felt more possessive of it because it's a mother-daughter story, and also because I was unable to be with my mother at the end of her life. I recorded it quite early on when I was still at a stage of disbelief where I thought, “If I sing the song like her, close my eyes and really mean it, maybe when I open them she'll appear in the room.”

Will you take your family on tour?

I'm seeing a Winnebago and my son and husband hitting a lot of places. I don't really want to go out without my son; that would be really hard. I could do a week or two, but I want to include him in my life. I don't want to have to give up one thing for the other. So people might be hearing some child activity.

—Amanda Farrah

‘I thought “Proserpina” was kind of my mother's last gift to me.’

