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CREATIVE LOAFING CHARLOTTE

## New album focuses on new phase of Rachael Sage's life

By Jeff Hahne [@ihahne](#)

While recording her upcoming ninth album, singer/songwriter **Rachael Sage** was going through the process of moving — not just to a new location, but into the next phase of her life. As we all do when moving, she was organizing, weeding through old things and attempting to collect and clean out all that she could. It's a theme that would carry over into the recording studio.

"I got rid of about a decade's worth of accumulated miscellanea -- clothes, books, nostalgia, things I was using more actively when I first started the label and a good portion of the second quarter of my life," Sage says by phone during a break from shooting a music video. "I very much had the concept of stuff and what you need and what you don't and simplifying. All of that was on my mind. I tend to hold on to a lot of things and ways of doing things and resisting change. In terms of the album and the songwriting, a lot of the songs reflect that."

Sage says she went into the studio with 22 songs -- not all of which were written specifically for the album, but all of which seemed to fit with the "new phase" in her life. One of the album's highlights is "Big Star," a pop track written about "anyone who feels like what they're doing is a pipe dream." The Wurlitzer-based song is more upbeat than the rest of the album, which is more piano-driven. "It has a bit more of a sparse, peppy and lighter feel," Sage says. "I wanted it to sound like Buddy Holly-era pop."

The song was written when Sage, now in her mid-30s, was in her mid-20s. It was originally written on a guitar, something Sage doesn't pick up often these days.

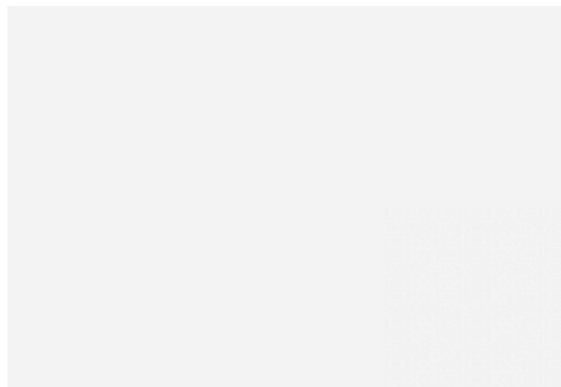
"I went through sort of a pre- and post-Lilith [Fair] phase when I was enamored with so many folk artists like Suzanne Vega, Ani DiFranco and many others," Sage says. "I love the tambour so much of an acoustic guitar. I made it a point to be able to play well enough to be able to write. After my first two albums, I felt like I had exhausted my ability to find a really interesting and surprising bridge in a song. That requires going to a place you haven't gone before, and on a piano, it's like nothing for me because I have so many options. I don't even think about what I'm doing, it's just like talking, but on a guitar, it's always very deliberate and simpler. I suppose I could explore that more in the future, but live, I really prefer to play keyboard."

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BILL BERNSTEIN

SPICE GIRL: Rachel Sage



For her tours, it's usually Sage behind the keyboard and a drummer, sometimes a trumpet player, as well. This time around, her drummer will be performing on a cocktail kit to make it easier for travel.

Sage says she hasn't had many hurdles because of her career as a piano-playing performer that some people might instantly lump together with Tori Amos, Norah Jones, Sara Bareilles or others.

"I think everything in life is a hurdle if you look at it as a hurdle," she says. "If you look at the opportunities, that's what you're gonna see. I'm not just being new age-y, I truly believe that. I do think that in general, even as a feminist and someone who is really indebted to other female artists who came before me to forge the way, I think you have two choices every single day -- look at something in the way and see how hard it is to break through it or see where the opportunities are. Radio is a different thing -- they see every female as the same genre, but that's radio's problem."

Speaking of radio, there seems to be a resurgence of the music of Hall and Oates recently. For example, The Bird and the Bee recently released an album of Hall and Oates covers, and Travis McCoy of Gym Class Heroes has tattoos of the singers. Sage's new album, *Delancey Street* -- which will be released digitally on April 20 and in stores in May -- includes her cover of "Rich Girl."

"It's kind of wacky," Sage says. "I had never heard of The Bird and the Bee, but a fan sent me a link to their song recently and I was like, 'Oh shit.' You think you're doing something quirky, but everybody's doing it. It's one of those pop culture things. Write great pop songs and eventually everyone will want to cover them at once."

Sage says the decision to cover the song was the most spontaneous choice on the album. She was invited to see the band on New Year's Eve and couldn't refuse the opportunity. She grew up listening to the duo she calls "one of the greatest pop bands ever." After being inspired by the performance that night, she was in the studio the next day and sat down at her Wurlitzer and started to play "Rich Girl." It ended up on the album.

Sage says she loves when fans call out songs from her extensive catalog for her to play. She just asks that if they are going to pick something that's more than three or four albums old, to send her an e-mail or MySpace message so she can "brush up on it."

After releasing her first album in 1995, you'd think Sage would be most comfortable on stage and performing, but she says she's really at ease only when she's at home working on a variety of projects.

"Comfortable is a funny word because I rarely think that I'm comfortable in general," she says. "I try to be. I think if I were looking to be comfortable, I would quit music and do crafts and visual artwork. It's the most relaxing and comfortable thing that I enjoy. It's what yoga is to other people -- sitting down for six hours in a row and not getting up and making shit -- decorating clothes or instruments, sewing things. I love that. That's where I get comfort. Music is something I feel that I have to do to express myself and connect to other people. I'd like to think that I could make a pair of jeans that would have the same effect, but I don't think so."

Rachael Sage will perform at *The Evening Muse* on April 8 at 8 p.m. with Danielle Howle. Tickets are \$8.