

QUEER VOICES

## Rachael Sage, Singer-Songwriter, Discusses New Album, 'Haunted By You,' Sexuality And More

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Music has been a part of Rachael Sage's life for as long as she can remember. The self-taught singer-songwriter, known for her melodic and often personal songs, made her foray into the musical world when she was just a toddler and she has been sharing her talents with eager audiences ever since.

Sage, who also runs her own record label, [MPress Records](#), will release her tenth album, "Haunted By You," on May 22th. She recently chatted with Huff Post Gay Voices about the upcoming release, the album's first single, "Abby Would You Wait," which we're featuring below, the intersection of music and sexuality, dating fans, and more.

**HuffPost Gay Voices: You've said that your album "Chandelier" is about fragility and 2010's "Delancey Street" is about "taking more risks." Is there a central unifying theme to "Haunted By You"?**

Rachael Sage: There is. This album is probably the most thematic of those three in terms of my writing process. I think of it as a song cycle about passion. I supposed it could be argued that most music is at its essence about passion but I was really focusing on romantic passion and how who we are in relationships reflects who we are in the rest of our lives. Of course, I came to that after a big four-year break up. It was a natural thing for me to focus on.

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**So does that mean the album is incredibly personal?**

It is on a certain level. Some of the songs are very personal but then other songs I wrote from a very imaginative place, almost projecting what could be and what I hope will be. I suppose that doesn't make it less personal -- just less literal.

**Have you ever written a song and then realized *Oh, this is way too personal. I can't put this out there?***

No. [*Laughs*] Like most of my peers I think there's that great feeling of satisfaction when you're able to get something out there onto the page or into the air that didn't exist before and if you feel that it really does reflect your spirit or something you want to say, that's usually a positive. Words here or there can be tweaked for anonymity and I've gone that route but there are other songs that -- for anyone who really knows me or knows the details of my life -- I'm pretty upfront. I think the mix of that is what I'm interested in. I really don't want to write one type of song. I will say that I try to follow the Ten Commandments [*laughs*] and honor the people I love and my family and that extends to my music writing process. I would never be apt to -- as my Southern mother would say -- air my dirty laundry that way. My own mess of a romantic life is fair game. [*Laughs*]

**Whenever I ask a musician about how their sexuality is or isn't an influence on their work I get incredibly different answers. Someone once told me that he wouldn't be a musician if he wasn't queer. What about you?**

I would definitely be a musician if I wasn't queer. I've been a musician since I was two and a half but I wasn't a particularly sexual person until I was 14. I think for me music is as pure of an expression as I've ever experienced -- whether I'm listening to someone else's or creating it. It's

something that's really primal but as I've grown into who I am and am ever evolving, it's how I express myself intellectually. It sort of transcends sexuality for me. And yet, of course just like with method acting or any other art form -- it really helps to write about what you know. If that's a same-sex relationship or a heterosexual relationship or if it's not about a relationship at all, if it's just a song about me being depressed that I don't do ballet anymore [*laughs*], anything is fair game and I think as an artist it's you're luxury to mine your own life. It's easier in a lot of ways than stepping outside of yourself and being purely imaginative. But I try to do both and be both types of writers.

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It's interesting, I saw Anne Rice last night being interviewed on television. She was asked if she has ever had an experience with ghosts or anything she believed in that way and she said very, very quickly, "Nope!" [*laughs*] which I think shocked everyone but that just made me admire her more because she really is coming from that place of pure imagination.

**Well, speaking of imagination -- or not -- tell me about the song "Abby Would You Wait," off of "Haunted By You," which we're featuring below. Where did the inspiration for that song come from?**

I was playing a house concert last year in Austin and it was just a random booking. My agent lined it up and suddenly you're in someone's lovely house and you don't know them and there you are in a very intimate musical situation playing for them and their friends. At intermission I ended up chatting with someone whose name is indeed Abby and she was just lovely. It was just one of those moments where, just like any of those

rock and roll guys back in the day who wrote a song about Betty Sue or Peggy Sue, I was just inspired by her and her presence and by the end of the night I had the song. It was really very quick and simple and fun and just came out very simply.

*Check out Sage's "Abby Would You Wait" below, then scroll down to keep reading:*

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**Even though we've come a long way in the last 20 or 30 years, it still shocks me when I hear a song that features a speaker addressing someone of the same sex in a romantic way. Did you ever worry about that or consider changing the names or the pronouns in your songs?**

At this point in my career? No. Early on? Absolutely. None of us are always as strong as we aim to be and certainly right around when I was coming out to my family -- even though I was already out to my friends -- there were lyrics I was writing -- this was 15 or 20 years ago -- it wasn't a particularly unique process, I've talked to other LGBT artists and they also struggled with that for a brief time until they really felt confident in who they were. It wasn't really about my career, it was more about is that the way I want certain people to know [about my sexuality] from hearing lyrics in a pop song?

I think now, thankfully, we're in a time when honesty is appreciated from artists in a way that it just wasn't before. Anyone from Ellen DeGeneres to Madonna to the "L Word" to countless actors and musicians have all paved the way and I'm just part of that community. I don't try to take on too much

responsibility in that regard. I just try to be authentic and be myself and hopefully the rest will follow.

**Do you hear from fans about that though? I know the term "role model" freaks out a lot of people but when you are in a position of visibility, you end up having people look -- if not up to you, then to you.**

I do hear it. It's just the most incredible feeling and honor, really. We're all just trying to figure out who we are and lead positive lives and I think sometimes it shocks me because I feel like I'm still working on so much -- and always will be -- so when someone comes up to me after a gig and thanks me for being true to myself and having less fear, I suppose, than maybe they do at that point in their lives, it's very sobering and humbling but I see it for what it is: I see that person is in a place where they appreciate that compassion from someone they don't even know whose music they're listening to. That's why I got into all of this -- so there could be that dialogue and that community with people you don't "know" -- you don't know the details of their daily lives but you know we're all human beings. I'm a very "cut to the chase" kind of person, even since I was a little kid, that was the part of being in the arts that drew me to it. I'm very fortunate to be queer, to understand that experience, and also to be able to translate some of those emotions and struggles into other situations and hopefully empathize with other people going through other kinds of challenges and alienation who also need that compassion from the art that they're ingesting.

**Last fall [I spoke to singer-songwriter Melissa Ferrick](#), who is on your record label, about groupies. Seeing as you had the experience you wrote about in "Abby Would You Wait," how do you feel about dating fans? Is it difficult in general to find people to date because your reputation so often precedes you?**

Melissa is a rock star at her essence. She gets up there and is a rocker. What I do is very different in terms of the way I connect to it. We all have our own reasons and purpose for getting on stage and sharing what's inside of ourselves and reaching out for something else from an audience, too -- beyond just being eccentric artists [*laughs*]. For me, I don't really orient to music in terms of wanting a fourth wall up, wanting to be larger than life

compared to my audience. I want to just be one of them and be with them and I probably should be more self-protective that way, but I'm not. So I have dated people that I've met at my shows and I have dated musicians, but I've also dated computer programmers and people who make furniture [*laughs*]. You have to hope that you get to a certain age and place in your life where you've just learned to be a good judge of character the same way other people are of you.

**I believe that about you -- reading your Twitter you're very open with your fans and seemingly very willing to let people into your life.**

I wouldn't have this life that I love without that support. I'd have a different life -- maybe I'd be at home doing visual art all day and listening to Beatles records [*laughs*]. Something compelled me to be up on the stage and you can't do that by yourself.

**It's just refreshing to hear someone being grateful for that. Seeing as I'm stuck in an office, I have fantasies of running off and traveling the world, which is something you actually get to do. Do you have any rituals that help you survive life on the road and living out of a suitcase?**

I don't have rituals that I do when I pull into a new city, but I also run a record label so I have rituals related to making sure all of that is where it needs to be and my approach to work and separating that type of work from performance. So for instance, I tend to stay up till 4:00 or 5:00am every night of my life because that's when I find the time to do all of those things. It's crucial -- if I don't have that time I feel very behind and I get thrown off creatively. So by two hours before my show I'm just warming up, shaking it out, writing down things I want to remember for the show. Those are the best circumstances when I'm really able to draw those lines. What helps me do that is having a ritual about how I eat. I love healthy food and that's very hard for me to get on the road. Whole Foods becomes like a trip to Disney World for us [*laughs*]. Finding an avocado is like riding the tea cups [*laughs*]. But those things really do affect how you are on stage, your sense of balance -- if all you've eaten is crap all day you're not going to sing as well or if you've forgotten to drink ten gallons of water you're going to be clearing your throat the whole set. I'm pretty disciplined -- I'm not that much fun until I get up on stage.

## **You're ruining your street cred!**

[Laughs] The other cool thing about the road is that on your days off you get a chance to explore where you are. We have friends almost everywhere we go now because we've been there before. In Austin, every Sunday after our SXSW event we go to Stubb's gospel brunch and I love gospel music. I think I'm a Baptist in a Jew's body -- because I just want to sing about Jesus all day long [laughs]. My office staff is so confused and looking at me like "where does this come from? Who is she?" [Laughs]

For more info on Rachael Sage, [visit her official website](#) and [follow her on Twitter](#).

Upcoming shows include:

Mar 29th The Great Pacific Pendleton, OR

Mar 30th The High Dive Seattle, WA

Mar 31st Hotel Café Los Angeles, CA

Apr 11th Club Café Pittsburg, PA

Apr 12th The Irving Theater Indianapolis, IN

Apr 13th ACE Bar Chicago, IL

Apr 14th Havana Columbus, OH

Apr 22nd Club Passim (w/ Gregory Douglass) Cambridge, MA

Apr 27th Higher Ground (w/ Gregory Douglass) S. Burlington, VT

Apr 28th Blue (w/ Gregory Douglass) Portland, ME

Apr 29th Café Nine (w/ Gregory Douglass) New Haven, CT

May 5th "Meet the Artist Series" @ Lincoln Center New York, NY

May 5th Cyber Café West Binghamton, NY

May 10th "Target Free Thursdays" @ Lincoln Center New York, NY

May 19th Joe's Pub - CD Release Party New York, NY

Jun 12th The Tin Angel (w/ SONia) Philadelphia, PA

Jun 13th Jammin Java (w/ SONia) Vienna, VA

RACHAEL SAGE

ABBY WOULD YOU WAIT



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