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RACHAEL SAGE



Character

(MPRESS) www.rachaelsage.com



Over fourteen albums Rachael Sage has certainly learned how to craft a song in her characteristically eclectic alt-pop style. But

however impressive her catalogue might be there's something special about this album. Recorded in the aftermath of a battle with cancer, there is a celebratory and uplifting feeling that infuses each song and Sage's performance. Only two numbers, 'Bravery's On Fire' and 'When I Was Young', face the condition head on but it remains the undercurrent to many others.

The quietly joyous 'Blue Sky Days' explores the contentment that can be found in centredness and appreciation of what is around you. Sage brings a range of influences into the songs – from blue eyed-soul to 90s pop – but throughout the singer's delicate voice provides a unifying thread that ties *Character* together.

One of the most striking stylistic diversions on the album is a cover of Ani DiFranco's 'Both Hands' which features Sage backed solely by a string quartet. The baroque atmosphere created is somehow the perfect vehicle for both music and lyrics. There's an old saying, that 'ashes will be exchanged for a crown of beauty'. From the fire of her adversity Rachael Sage has certainly created a beautiful collection of songs.

Trevor Raggatt

Compassion, love, beauty and art

Rachael Sage brings a range of disparate influences into her music. There are clear echoes of classical music in her piano playing and in the delicate structure of her songs. "Initially, that was my main influx of melody, dynamics and emotional range in music, and I'm sure it was my biggest influence overall," she says. "At some point I got really into my dad's Beatles, Buddy Holly and doo-wop collections, along with singer-songwriters like Carole King and James Taylor.

"During my school years I was into artists as eclectic as Howard Jones, Suzanne Vega, David Bowie, Sinéad O'Connor, Tom Petty and Elvis Costello." Add some classic Broadway musicals and it's a heady list of formative influences. However, she is definite about her artistic bottom line. "My barometer has generally been, 'Does it have a great melody? Does it move me viscerally? Are the lyrics telling me a story or sparking my imagination in some new way?'"

That emotional honesty is at the core of her music — especially on her latest album, *Character*, recorded in the aftermath of her recovery from cancer. "I didn't create or play a single note of music while I was actually in treatment — I just didn't have the energy. So for nine months or so, I focused pretty singularly on just 'getting through it' and didn't bother trying to 'make art from it'.

"However, I did listen to music constantly while I was getting my chemo, and one of the songs that kept coming up on my playlist was 'Both Hands' by Ani DiFranco. Once I started getting better it found its way naturally to my hands on the guitar, and felt like something I should take for my own spin, in the studio. I've always loved it, so I'm grateful it not only distracted me from pain but also very definitively helped me heal."

It's hard to single out one particular song on *Character* but this interpretation is exquisite. "Recording it with a string quartet was incredibly exciting. I knew I wanted it to sound like The Brodsky Quartet and specifically, like it could belong on Elvis Costello's *The Juliet Letters* — probably my favourite contemporary album, ever." Sage arranged the song in collaboration with cellist, Dave Eggar (Evanescence, Coldplay, and many others) and then recorded it live in the studio. "The sheer joy of helping arrange and conduct the wonderful string players pretty much affirmed that I was going to be not only okay, but also thrive."

Given the circumstances in which the album was created, Sage could have been forgiven for wallowing in the injustice of her illness. However, there is an ascendant tone throughout that is equal parts inspiring and uplifting. "I only wrote two songs directly about my cancer experience on this record though, of course, being in recovery and so eager to resume a life in music and, in effect, to recover my identity as well as my physical health, ignited other songs.

"I naturally always look for opportunities to empower and uplift and I think I would bore myself to tears if every song was a chronicle of my own troubles. My nature is to look for evidence of holiness, of inspiration and beauty. I am someone who, throughout my entire life, has looked to compassion, love, beauty and art as the basis of my value system and tried to manifest that in my work.

"In that sense, this album was no different, but of course there was a feeling that we were doing something sacred, at a time when my levels of appreciation and gratitude were off the charts, so to speak."

Trevor Raggatt

