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LAST LAUGH

TUNE UP

As if being an actress-producer-singer-A-list Hollywood wife weren't enough, **Rita Wilson** is adding another slash to her multifaceted career: songwriter.

In addition to playing the control-freak mother of the bride on *Girls* and producing *My Big Fat Greek Wedding 2*, out March 25, Wilson co-wrote the tunes on her new, self-titled album.

Here, the always-entertaining star shares the highs and lows of writing, recording, performing and what it's like being haunted by the ghosts of old Hollywood.

LIVE WIRE
Wilson kicks off a nationwide tour with a 10-night engagement at the iconic Café Carlyle, through March 5.

Writing a song is like this: You meet a complete stranger, you strip emotionally naked, you have musical intercourse and then you give birth to a beautiful song. I co-wrote my new album with a number of collaborators, including Kara DioGuardi and Jason Reeves. My writing room was James Dean's acting coach's old studio, or so I have been told. Kara, Jason and I wrote my new song "Grateful" there, above a little chicken-to-go place. In the middle of it, we ordered french fries and Guinness. Beer and french fries definitely improve songwriting!

We recorded some of the songs at Capitol Records. Every morning, I'd walk down the hall and see pictures of Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole, Judy Garland, The Beatles. I recorded in the same studio and sang on the same microphone that Sinatra used, which said "Frank" on it. Not too intimidating!

But recording studios have changed since those days. They've always been dark and windowless places, kind of like Vegas, where no one knows what time it is. But unlike the olden days, our big drug of choice was chocolate.

I've found that singing is very different from acting, where you put on a character and have a script to hide behind.

With music, you're out there front and center, and you never know what's going to happen. One night at The Carlyle, a woman's phone went off while I was singing "Please Come to Boston," and I improvised an entire verse and chorus about her and her phone. I hadn't done that before—and haven't ever again—but it was so fun because everyone in the audience was in on the joke and laughing. Being able to connect with your audience is one of the great things about performing live.

One of the songs on my new album is "Girls Night In," which is based on my real-life get-togethers with my friends. One of the most memorable times was when I rented a small dance studio and had a friend teach us how to do the dances in Britney Spears' "I'm a Slave 4 U" and Janet Jackson's "All for You." There's nothing funnier than seeing a bunch of 40-something women trying to dance like 20-year-olds. It was a blast, though I have to confess, margaritas were involved.

My friends were in the "Girls Night In" video too. Tom [Hanks, Wilson's husband] also has a cameo in the video. He only got the job because he slept with the producer. I'm keeping him hard at work!