

Q&A: Rita Wilson talks new album, tour



Rita Wilson is ready to show a new side of herself to audiences.

The acclaimed actress and producer captured a classic California sound on her debut album, the 2012 covers collection "AM/FM." Now, she's set to make her debut as a songwriter with her self-titled second album. Set to be released via Sing It Loud on March 11, the set finds Wilson working with acclaimed co-writers and producers including Dan Wilson and [Kennny "Babyface" Edmonds](#).

Wilson is currently in the middle of a residency at the Cafe Carlyle in New York City, and this spring she'll hit the road for a series of dates that includes an April 29 show at the South Orange Performing Arts Center.

Q: How are you feeling with the new album just around the corner and a big run of dates coming up this spring?

A: It's kind of exciting, to be honest with you. I've been working on the record for a couple of years, so it's really nice to finally have people hear it and listen to it, and nerve-racking at the same time because this is original music. The last album was covers, that was something very accessible, and this is something brand new, so I hope that people will respond to it.

That's one of the reasons why I wanted to do the tour — because I love performing live and I love meeting people. I just love that connection that you get with an audience. So I'm excited about that because I've never done that before in such a comprehensive way. And getting on a tour bus with my band and going across the country is like vacation/road trip/performing. It doesn't feel like a job, it feels more like fun.



Rita Wilson arrives at the Country Music Hall Of Fame & Museum's "All For The Hall" fundraising concert at Club Nokia on March 4, 2014 in Los Angeles. (Photo: Getty Images)

Q: Before you hit the road you have a residency at a great spot in New York, the Cafe Carlyle. How's that going to be for you, getting into a chance to really settle into a groove there?

A: Well, I love the Cafe Carlyle. I did a show there a couple of years ago and had the best time. It a wonderful audience, to be sure, but it's also intimate. I feel like you get to know everybody while you're there performing; the waiters, the staff, the bartenders. It's kind of familial in an odd way.

So the show is really loose, and I don't mean loose in the way that

it's unprepared. There's definitely an intimacy there and it's very spontaneous. You're connected to the audience. They're right there. You're watching them eat a souffle and drink Champagne while you're singing so it's really close-up and personal, but that's what I love about it, too.

Q: I would think your covers album wasn't too dissimilar from an acting job in that you were taking someone else's composition and putting your own spin on it to bring it to life. This new album is much more you and very bare; these are your words, your stories. How is the approach to the material different in both cases?

A: You've totally nailed it because that's exactly what it's like. And it doesn't mean that you don't have an amazing time and find a way to create something from other people's material for cover songs, because I'd say all the songs on "AM/FM" are songs that I love and have loved for many years.

But there is something different about doing your own material because it is very specific and at the same time you're co-writing with others so you're getting their stuff too, and I think that's what made the process so enjoyable, the intimacy that's created when you go in to write with someone and the openness that everyone has to approach the songwriting process with.

I loved that, I often described it as falling in love with a stranger, making fabulous musical intercourse after you've stripped emotionally naked and giving birth to a beautiful song baby. You have to get down and inside and get to the nitty gritty of things you want to be talking about. A lot of times that can be a really fun session where you're just laughing hysterically, or it can be one of those sessions where you're getting to stuff that's kind of painful or sensitive, and both of those things are equally rewarding.



Rita Wilson has an upcoming performance at the South Orange Performing Arts Center. (Photo: Courtesy of Steven Sebring)

Q: One of the great songwriters on this record is Dan Wilson. I've been a fan of his work since Semisonic and "Crying, Crying," the song the two of you wrote for this is just terrific.

A: I love him so much. We also wrote that song with Darrell Brown, he's another co-writer on that song. It was incredible, somewhat intimidating initially, to work with Dan. Darrell and Dan had written together before so they knew each other. I am in awe of him as a musician and a songwriter and a human being, having gotten to know him now. But when you go in to write with somebody for the first time, I came in with the idea of wanting to write about this thought that there could be other stuff going on in your life, but what you put forward is not exactly the face that reflects what's going on inside.

I think as an actor, and just growing up and living in Los Angeles, as a woman, you're kind of just (told), "Be a people-pleaser, don't make waves, don't bother anybody with your stuff because nobody really wants to hear what's going on with you." At the same time, I think we're all longing for that connection, to have someone say, "Are you OK? How's it going?"

Dan, Darrell and I had all experienced moments like that in our lives, and that was the idea we ran with. Sometimes you pitch an idea and they're like, "I don't know," but this one resonated for all of us, like, "We can do that. We can write that idea."

He also produced that track so I got to know him as a producer as well, and having written one of my favorite songs of all time and maybe the world's favorite song, "[Someone Like You](#)," with Adele, I knew I was in excellent hands. I just love that the song is an up-tempo, happy melody, but the lyrics are much more resonant of something that might go with a ballad.



Rita Wilson, pictured in 2015, will release her second album in March. (Photo: Associated Press)



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Q: The record is very stylistically diverse, it goes from something really fun like “Girls Night In” to an emotionally bare piano ballad, “Forgiving Me Forgiving You.” It’s like you’re showing all of these different aspects of yourself as a person and a performer, and that makes the album an unpredictable and engaging listen.

A: I hope so. I feel like what I wrote is really a reflection of me, and I am that person. I am the person in “Girls Night In” and I’m also the person in “Forgiving Me Forgiving You,” and I wanted to communicate those aspects. Sometimes they kind of veered into a different genre, that’s also a reflection of my taste in music.

I grew up in the ’60s and ’70s in California, and everything that was on commercial radio back then was multi-genre, it was everything from the Beatles to the Supremes to Johnny Cash to Elvis to the Beach Boys or the Righteous Brothers. So I think I grew up listening to all of that, and I kind of wish we still had that, in a way. That’s why my iPhone is so good because I can just put on a playlist of multi-genre material and enjoy it. I love that so much.

I love pop music because I’m attracted to a good hook and being able to sing along, and I love ballads and I love country rock. I hope it doesn’t look schizophrenic. It really is totally a reflection of my tastes and who I am and what was going on with me at the time.

RITA WILSON

WHEN: Through March 5

WHERE: Cafe Carlyle, 35 East 76th St., New York City

TICKETS: \$100 to \$175

INFO: 212-744-1600 or <http://thecafecarlyle.com>

AND

WHEN: 8 p.m. April 29

WHERE: South Orange Performing Arts Center, One SOPAC Way, South Orange

TICKETS: \$35 to \$145

INFO: 973-313-2787 or www.sopacnow.org/rita-wilson

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/music/2016/02/24/q-rita-wilson-talks-new-album-tour/80813364/>