

Ambition Squared

THE INCOMPARABLE CYNDI LAUPER



Cyndi Lauper has one great fear: becoming “fucking boring.” If her atypical musical styling wasn’t enough to prevent this, her aesthetic and unique fashion sense — from wild hairdos and vibrant outfits — surely do the trick. Her forceful drive, likely based on said fear, is what keeps Lauper as one of today’s most beloved performers, with iconic hits like “Girls Just Want to Have Fun” remaining a staple within the canon of feel-good songs. On top of being one of the world’s most famous singers, Lauper has spent the past few decades diligently working as an activist supporting women and the LGBTQ community. More recently, she hit the road again to tour and promote her 11th studio album, *Detour*. Recorded in Nashville, it’s a country album made up of covers, but with a feisty and eccentric touch that only Lauper could deliver.

“When I listen to songs like ‘Girls Just Want To Have Fun’ or ‘She Bop,’ I would have never known how to sing like that had it not been for Wanda Jackson or Frankie Lymon,” she explains when asked about why she covered these particular

songs. “You know, Elvis Presley, Patsy Kline...even Loretta Lynn, they were all a part of that fabric of me growing up.” If anything stands out from our interview, it’s the impressive breadth of artists that Lauper studies and admires. “It’s very much Americana,” she says. “It’s very much a part of this country’s musical fabric, and especially at that time period when blues and country went hand in hand. I would go from country to blues or from blues to country, and that was exciting.”

Some of Lauper’s earlier memories include sitting in her living room in Queens with her grandmother and watching artists like Kline sing on *Arthur Godfrey’s Talent Scouts*. When she later performed with Blue Angel, an ‘80s retro-rockabilly band, she learned how to sing swing music, which is reflected on the new album. Due to her familiarity with them, Lauper felt that most of the songs were already perfect before she laid down her own covers. “Why should I beat songs to death that are already proven as wonderful?” she asks rhetorically.

“They already have wonderful sounds and arrangements. You don’t need to reinvent the wheel. I just wanted to create a vibe and make an album that you could play in the background.”

Obviously, someone as unique as Lauper couldn’t let the songs go without her own animated flair. In this case, that came from recording everything live. “If you can record the moment of discovery on the album, that gives life or breadth, and that’s what you want,” she tells. “You want life in the music. You want it to feel alive.” If there’s anything to describe Lauper and her new work, “alive” would be the correct word. However, “ambitious” wouldn’t be too far behind. When asked about what she looks forward to, she says, “I kinda want to do a Rita Moreno and have an EGOT [the winning of an Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony award], but I don’t. Yeah, that’s what I’m looking forward to.” x

Written by
Mathias Rosenzweig

Photo by
Elizabeth Lippman