

COMMUNICATING & CONNECTING

Rachael Sage describes the song writing on her new album 'Myopia' as more socially-conscious, and some of the issues she tackles make this an important addition to her extensive catalogue.

Since founding her own record label, MPress, two decades ago, New York-based singer-songwriter Rachael Sage has released a dozen albums. The 13th addition to this extensive catalogue is 'Myopia', a collection of songs that give a first-person take on some major social issues.

The change in style is noticeable throughout the album and the socially-conscious approach is evident when we speak to Sage from her East Village home studio with 'Myopia' about to drop. "Today in NYC, we are having our Primary Election. There's a palpable sense of excitement and empowerment among everyone I know, that today is a day when each of our voices truly matters, when we can shift the tide in a substantive way by simply 'showing up' to express our individual viewpoints.

"Likewise, I think it's a very important time to be making and sharing art, across all disciplines. So, in that sense, I feel very grateful and fortunate to have the opportunity to be heard as a songwriter – and to hopefully be sharing a message of hope and positivity, via my new album!"

This attitude can be seen in Sage's evolution as an artist for 'Myopia'. "I always try to serve the emotion of the songs to be honest. Like a theatrical script, the songs themselves tell me how to produce and arrange them. I definitely did want to push myself to play more electric guitar this time, and to just go for it when it came to more creative arrangements like *Haunted By Objects*, which basically began as an a capella track I recorded while clapping, and then later played Moog synth and added strings and guitar to. I'm never really aiming to shock though. My goal is always to communicate and connect, whatever the context."

Despite the creative arrangement, *Haunted by Objects* was a track that developed rapidly. "It came together very quickly actually, as it was improvised. I had the lyric and melody in my head for a while, but I didn't ever take it to the piano or the guitar. So, when I recorded it, I just clapped at the same time, like a Flamenco rhythm – except that the time signatures change, and I guess that's what makes it seem 'out there' even though it felt natural to me. From there, my drummer added some percussion around my initial performance and then I overdubbed my Moog part right away. The strings and guitars were icing on the cake, added a few days later."

The album itself has a distinct vocal style with first-person narration a common tool used.

"There are several songs on the album where I'm singing in the first-person, but the story is not personally my own," explains Sage. "For instance, *Snowed In* is about Edward Snowden, and conveys an almost psychedelic sense of paranoia that just happens to be based on true events. So, I really was narrating, even though the tone is poetic.

"*This Darkness* was written about the Dakota Pipeline, from the perspective of a Native American water protector. After seeing gut-wrenching footage of a woman risking everything to prevent the desecration a sacred water source – defending the environment for all of us – it was impossible not to want to tell that story. Those are just two examples of first-person narration on the album – but yes, it was definitely the intention."

This style is continued with one of the album's standout tracks. "*Daylight* is about a woman whose partner comes home from military service with PTSD and violent tendencies that permeate their relationship. While I haven't experienced that specific scenario, unfortunately I have encountered violent and erratic behaviour in relationships, so I did my best to merge the emotional insight I do have, with the reality of the story in this song."

While *Daylight* is a clear highlight of 'Myopia', another stand-out track from the album is *Sympathy Seed* which provides a musically different approach. It starts off in a very chilling and sinister manner, especially the piano key, while the vocals are notably distorted, and quieter, to compliment the instrumentals.

"The song is about a misanthrope, literally... someone who has no empathy and finds it impossible to relate to the pain and suffering of others. Of course, fear is always at the root of hate – so I just wanted to convey that sense of loathing and isolation musically. The vocal was sung through a "bullet-mic", which gives it that transistor radio effect."

The range of vocal styles deployed in the record certainly show Sage's range as well as her willingness to experiment. "When going for vocals, I definitely have to get myself into the zone, whether it's by lighting a bunch of candles, putting up a black curtain so even the engineer can't see me dancing around, or just shutting off the lights. Whatever it takes!

"As a producer, I generally choose to use two specific microphones for lead vocals. One is the crunchier, distorted-sounding Shure 520D bullet-mic I mentioned, and the other is an incredibly warm Telefunken 251 that

they have at Carriage House Studios that everyone from Diana Ross to The Pixies have sung on. Hey, if it ain't broke...

"Basic tracks for the album were recorded at Carriage House Studios in Stamford, Connecticut, while many of the overdubs were recorded at my home studio in New York City. I actually did most of the vocals in my closet and I was able to have a bunch of my NYC-based musician friends – including Nalani & Sarina and Fiona Harte – come by and sing because they happened to be in the neighbourhood. It was the best of both worlds!"

While the music is obviously the most important part of the process for creating a record, Sage has also become well known for the hand-drawn artwork that often accompanies an album. However, there is something different in store for her fans with 'Myopia'.

"I saved the hand-drawn artwork for my merch this time around," she reveals. "I have a limited-edition poster and some T-shirts with my eye-drawings, but the album art itself is much moodier and comprised of striking photographic images by Erin Baiano. I got a hold of some very evocative vision-themed props (including an antique eye-examination contraption), and I think we created something very unique that definitely tells a story."

Reflecting on the whole process of creating 'Myopia' it is easy to see that Sage believes she has grown as an artist and is now taking a wider view with her song writing. "I think that I've veered more away from my personal history and am writing and creating with a wider lens that's more inclusive and, for lack of a better word, more socially-conscious. I suppose I've become a lot more interested in our interconnectedness and in chronicling collective cultural experiences than in rehashing my own personal life. I also think the music has a more organic quality to it and is a bit less slick than my last album, sonically."

Looking to the future, with 'Myopia' now available, Sage is planning the next stage of her artistic journey. "I have a couple of videos in the works that will be coming out later this Autumn, and I'm also working on an entirely acoustic version of the 'Myopia' album, which is coming along really well and should be released in early 2019. I'm never just sitting still doing nothing!"

This may be the 13th offering from Sage, but it certainly feels like a new beginning for her artistically.

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