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PLAYLIST | JOAN OSBORNE

She Relishes Covers, Arias and '70s R&B

By WINTER MILLER
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THE singer-songwriter Joan Osborne didn't have to go far for inspiration for her eighth studio album, "Little Wild One" (Time Life). She found it just beyond her doorstep. The album, due out Sept. 9, pays homage to New York City, her adopted home. Her new gospel-infused pop anthems and hymns, she said, are a response to 9/11 as well as [Walt Whitman's](#) poetry about the city. Her next performance is Friday, one of her series of gigs with John Hiatt, in Beaver Creek, Colo.; her tour in support of "Little Wild One" will begin on Sept. 25 at the Music Hall in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Before all that Ms. Osborne vacationed on the beach in South Carolina with family and friends and spoke by phone with Winter Miller about what she's listening to now. "It's new music, but it all sounds retro," she said of her picks. "I don't know if that says something about my taste or whether that is what's out there."



Todd Chalfant

Joan Osborne, best known for her hit "One of Us" from her second album, "Relish," and some of her current influences.

The Ting Tings

This is a little bit of a nostalgic thing. "We Started Nothing" (Sony) reminds me of a new wave, late '70s-early '80s sound that reminds me of being 16 years old and sneaking into the only club in Louisville, Ky., that had bands playing original music. There was a band called the End Tables that my high school friends and I followed. It reminds me of pogo dancing and getting slammed into by ruffian teenage boys on the dance floor. Some lyrics have a real sting or bite. It reminds me of this city group called the Aquanettas that was around in the early '90s. It's not a deep meaningful record; it's a guilty pleasure. It's a lot of fun and great driving music.

Natalie Dessay

She has a gorgeous voice. As a songwriter I'm trying to release myself from some automatic responses I have to song structures. I seem to be going to a lot of the same places again and again — traditional pop, rock or country. I'm trying to listen to things that allow me to release

myself from those habits. Arias have different rules about tempo and arrangement, a different mind-set. I'm working on something that I hope is more sophisticated than some things I've done. Listening to opera helps. "Italian Opera Arias" (Virgin) is so beautiful, so lush. There's a creaminess about her voice as an instrument that I would love to bring to what I'm working on, and an unabashed romanticism. A lot of the new stuff I'm working on is very romantic and harkens back to romanticism.

Cat Power

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I saw her in Scotland do "New York, New York"; it's so gutsy to do that song in the first place. Everyone knows the Sinatra version, and she turned it inside out and gave it this Memphis lens. It wasn't just a stunt; it gave it new life and new meaning. It wasn't referring to the Sinatra version. I went out and got "Jukebox" (Matador). I do covers. It's difficult to take a well-known song and bring something new to it without imitating the version everyone knows or being slavishly devoted to what's familiar.

Gnarls Barkley

I heard through the grapevine Al Green was making a record with Ahmir Thompson of the Roots. I heard the song "Who's Gonna Save My Soul" in a store and thought it was the new record. I realized it wasn't Al Green and found that it was Gnarls Barkley from "The Odd Couple" (Atlantic). I just downloaded the one song and have been listening to that. They have these older, plastic, 1950s rhythm-and-blues influences in their sound, but they have a way of turning things on their head. They have an anarchic sensibility that you would not have heard in these classic records. Just when I feel like I know what they're going to do, they do something different.

Al Green

"Lay It Down" (EMI) is almost like a guilty pleasure; it's so much like a classic Al Green record from the early '70s, it's almost like cheating. The producers have made this wonderful place for him to exist musically that I don't think he's had since the '70s. It's like somebody found a way to turn back the clock. I'm listening to it all the time. I like the guests on it; it's obvious they're in Al Green's house, but they fit right in. His voice sounds amazing. I've seen him in concert many times. He may not always go for those high notes, but he can still sing his songs in the original keys. He still has that gospel fervor as a performer, but there's a depth and richness to his voice he didn't have as a younger singer. He has all the range and elasticity that he ever did. That's something to strive for, to add textures to what your voice has. I will have to call him up and find out what he's eating. First I'll have to get his number.

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