

January 28, 2012

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STEP BY STEP DIY darling Ingrid Michaelson is ready to grow up

Ingrid Michaelson (@ingridmusic) will be the first to admit she's outgrown the cutesy singer/songwriter persona she's cultivated during the past several years. Once the poster girl for charming indie commercial ditties—her kitschy tune “The Way I Am” was inescapable in

the fall of 2007 after placement in an Old Navy TV ad and eventually went platinum—she's realized it's time to take her next step as an artist.

“I kind of always feel like the little sister at the older sister's slumber party,” says the Staten Island-bred singer, whose songs have also been used to sell such products as Mott's Apple Juice and have been prominently featured in a number of TV shows, including “Grey's Anatomy,” “Parenthood” and “One Tree Hill.” “I either want to be a little older or maybe the older sister.”

Though Michaelson acknowledges that the commercial appeal of her earlier work helped launch her career, her latest effort, *Human Again*, due Jan. 24 on her own Cabin 24 Records in a partnership with Mom + Pop, finds her ditching the kitsch in an effort to showcase a bolder, more mature side.

“She wanted to move beyond perceptions of her fitting perfectly into the singer/songwriter or the ukulele-based, perfect-music-to-sell-a-product genres,” says Michaelson's manager

Lynn Grossman, who first discovered the singer on Myspace in 2006. “On *Human Again*, the egg is cracked and she's poking her head out into a new world.”

Michaelson credits producer David Kahne (Paul McCartney, Stevie Nicks) with helping her find her voice on the new album and encouraging her to display her strengths as a singer. She notes her past albums—2007's *Girls and Boys*, which featured “The Way I Am” and has sold 332,000 (according to Nielsen SoundScan); 2008's EP *Be OK* (195,000 copies); and 2009's *Everybody*, which was released on Cabin 24 in partnership with Universal Motown and bowed at No. 18 on the Billboard 200 (145,000)—were “vocally very cautious.”

“I feel like I had a big splash when I first started,” Michaelson says. “My only real regret is, that splash was more about that it was an independent and new way of doing business. I never had that artistic splash.”

Human Again opens with “Fire,” a propulsive orchestral powerhouse that sets the tone for her new musical exploration. String arrangements carry a number of songs, such as hauntingly beautiful lead single “Ghost,” and Michaelson lays emotions bare on delicate piano-led ballads

(“I'm Through”) and intimate acoustic tracks (“How We Love”).

Grossman notes the material on *Human Again* will lend itself to different kinds of licensing opportunities compared with those that Michaelson's earlier upbeat, pop-focused material attracted. The artist's team is also branching out from its licensing comfort zone to focus on new media and brand partnerships, Grossman adds, including cross-promotion with retail store Anthropologie.

Michaelson is also venturing into TV and film: She and a former high school friend are shopping around a sitcom pilot based on Michaelson's experiences as a budding singer/songwriter, and she's collaborating with movie directors to write music, including for the film “Misfits,” starring Guy Pearce.

“Since Ingrid owns all of her own content, it makes it easy to work with startup companies or well-known companies who are constantly launching new services,” Grossman says.

Michaelson adds that as she grows as an artist, she's being more selective about the opportunities that present themselves. “I don't want to become a caricature of myself,” she says. “I want to put on some high heels instead of Converse.”

The way she is: INGRID MICHAELSON

