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EVERLASTING LIGHT

Ingrid
Michaelson





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Takes the Stage

BY JESSICA JARDINE
PHOTOS BY MARC LEMOINE



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or her fourth album, singer-songwriter Ingrid Michaelson did something she'd never done before: she channeled her inner diva. Now, that doesn't mean she demanded all-white rooms and banned eye contact from passing underlings; it means she and producer David Kahne sat down and figured out how to bring her singing voice to the forefront, giving *Human Again* a vocal range that had yet to be tapped on Michaelson's previous efforts.

"He pushed me to sing out," says Michaelson. "He came to one of my shows before we decided to work together and, after seeing me, was like, 'Wow. Why don't you sing like that on your record?' I said, 'I guess I kind of like the idea of being a little precious with my voice.' And he said, 'You *need* to sing like that on your records.' After he told me that, I wrote so much because I was inspired to use this other part of my voice. Of course, now I'm screwed for performing live," she laughs.

Kahne knows the sound of powerful voices, too, having cut his teeth producing records for artists like Stevie Nicks, Regina Spektor and Sir Paul McCartney. But the process of working together didn't mean Michaelson and her producer became peas in a pod immediately. "He's very opinionated and so am I," she says. "And we both think that our opinions are the *right* opinions, so it led to a lot of butting heads in a good way. One time, he said, 'As long as you stick to your guns and I stick to my guns, we're gonna come out of this and it's gonna be great.' And I think that's what we did."





The record certainly does speak for itself, showcasing the librarian-chic Michaelson—with her brunette hair and Tina Fey glasses—as she expands her folk-inspired, catchy sound. As always, her capable singing voice is the centerpiece, as she sings about a dark personal period involving lost romance. She notes that the process brought about a flood of writing that vastly outweighed her previous efforts.

“I’m really surprised because, [while] I write constantly, for every 10 songs I like one of them. I’m really just happy and pleasantly surprised that I was able to write all of these.” And then, after a long pause, she notes, “I feel like it’s never going to happen again. But at least I got it out there!”

If you think that this emotional writing deluge means she could be an overwrought and somber woman, you might be shocked to learn Michaelson is a huge comedy fan. In fact, she and a high school friend penned and shot a mockumentary-style pilot presentation this past year, in which Michaelson stars.

“It’s basically an exaggerated version of my life when I first started playing shows that were all kind of embarrassing,” she says. “It’s about life on the road when you’re just starting out, and all of the funny things that happen along the way.”

This isn’t the singer’s first foray into acting, as she studied theater in college and has continued writing and performing with her comedy friends over the years. “I kind of left [acting] by the wayside for music,” Michaelson says. “I really love comedy and I just shot something else with my friend who is a comedian here in New York. In it, we’re a middle-aged Staten Island couple and we’re doing our own commercial—kind of like the [Fred Armisen–starring] “Marble Columns” *SNL* skit. We just did it the other day and I think we’re going to write a lot more stuff together. Even if things don’t get picked up, I can always just put it out on my own, or go to Hulu. There are so many ways.”



But singing remains Michaelson's number-one focus for the time being, which works out well considering what a rapidly ascending star she's become. Since self-releasing her first record *Slow the Rain* in 2005, she's been a Billboard regular and her songs have been featured on a boatload of popular TV shows, including *Grey's Anatomy*, *One Tree Hill* and *Scrubs*. Her hauntingly sparse cover of the classic Elvis track "Can't Help Falling in Love" was also in the trailer for the critically acclaimed 2011 film about young love, *Like Crazy*.

But the feather in her cap she might be most proud of is an appearance in last year's Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. She appeared on a float and sang "Blood Brothers" off her new album, necessitating she learn the ropes of lip-syncing for an audience of millions.

"It was pretty intense," Michaelson says with a laugh. "I assume everybody knows this—evidently people don't—but there's no live singing [in the parade]. Everybody lip-syncs. So, that was making me really frightened that people would think that I couldn't sing. I was filled with anxiety for most of it, but the best part was being on the float and going down Broadway. There were six million people at the parade! It was incredible." The appearance also served as a kind of homecoming for the native New Yorker. "I grew up in Staten Island and I live in Brooklyn now," Michaelson says. "This is my

hometown. I've watched that parade every year since I was a little kid, so it was *really* surreal. I don't think it really hit me until I was on the float and it was moving. There are people all around you, screaming. And they tell you to smile and wave the whole time but you're on the float for like an hour and a half before you perform, in the cold. I thought, 'What am I going to do for an hour and a half?' but it went by so fast. You can't help but smile and wave because *everyone* is smiling and waving at you—thousands and thousands of people. In fact, the singing was actually my least favorite part!"

Michaelson will have no trouble getting the opportunity to truly belt her crisp and capable voice as she unleashes *Human Again*. Aside from her more heavily spotlit vocals, the record is also a foray into new soundscapes. She balances the piano-heavy ballads that have been her bread and butter with pensive retreats into a more melancholic sound, as on the first single "Ghost." There's also the sublimely catchy "Blood Brothers," which has her voice positively soaring alongside folksy back-up singers and a foot-stomping beat. And if you're worried she might blow out those powerhouse vocal chords with such a demanding and eclectic mix, she's got a card up her sleeve.

"I think Celine Dion doesn't talk one day a week so maybe I'll try that," she says with a laugh. **R**

INGRID MICHAELSON
shot in NEW YORK CITY
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