

CHELY WRIGHT
I Am The Rain

The opening chords of the first track, "Inside," on award-winning, singer-songwriter, author, and activist Chely Wright's new record, *I AM THE RAIN*, are direct, purposeful, and intense – a sound that defines the brilliant album. After more than five years away from the spotlight, and through a heroic personal and creative journey, Wright has returned with the release of a long anticipated new CD. And as she begins to sing the lyrics of "Inside," her confidence, intelligence, and poetic ambition quickly come into focus.

When it came time to record her new album, Chely knew it was going to be different from everything she had done in the past. Scheduled for release on September 9th, Wright and multiple GRAMMY® Award-winning producer/artist Joe Henry (Allen Toussaint, Bonnie Raitt, Carolina Chocolate Drops) approached the work as a new beginning. Her recent songs were coming from a place of total openness and spoke to the kind of self-discovery that changes lives.

Putting her talents as a singer-songwriter to the fore-front, the beginnings of which can be seen with producer Rodney Crowell on her 2010 record *LIFTED OFF THE GROUND*, becomes fully formed on *I AM THE RAIN*. Crowell actually pointed Chely to Henry and he quickly became a vital influence and contributor to *I AM THE RAIN*. "Joe's a visionary," Wright says. "He taught me to understand that a great deal of making music is intention, and then to trust those intentions all the way. As terrifying as it could be expressing some of these feelings, those have become my best moments. That let me reach for my best self and trust what I found when I did that; and to not be afraid about being imperfect. Instead, just be able to let go."

On her new album, Wright finally realizes all those dreams of making music that comes from her deepest soul. She has arrived, and we are among the lucky beneficiaries.

Her 2010 Random House memoir, *LIKE ME*, describes a life of dizzying heights as well as terrifying lows. The truth is told, no matter how painful it might be. As the artist wrote about her coming out as a lesbian, she also struggled with facing all the trauma and inner turmoil she had been through.

Getting there for Wright has been a lifelong journey. Born in Kansas City, Missouri, she grew up in a musical family in the small town of Wellsville, Kansas. The young Wright starting singing professionally at age 11, and by her senior year of high school was working as performing musician at the Ozark Jubilee, a country music show in Branson, Missouri. After graduating, the young Kansan went directly to Nashville as part of the music production at Opryland USA theme park. Wright landed her first label deal in 1993 with Mercury/Polygram and immediately started getting serious attention in country music circles. In 1995, she was named Top New Female Vocalist by the Academy of Country Music, then scored her first Top 40 country hit in 1997 with "Shut Up and Drive," from her third album *LET ME IN*. Two years later, Wright's fourth album *SINGLE WHITE FEMALE* produced several hit singles, including the chart-topping Number 1 title track and her first gold album certification. In 2000, Wright and artist Brad Paisley co-wrote the duet "Hard to Be a Husband, Hard to Be a Wife," performing it at the Grand Ole Opry's 75th anniversary gala. There were other career highlights in the next few years, including a

nomination for The Horizon Award Vocal Event of the Year at the annual Country Music Association Awards, Top Female Vocalist at the Academy of Country Music Association, a Top 4 debut for her 2001 album NEVER LOVE YOU ENOUGH, and being named to *People* magazine's "50 Most Beautiful People" list that same year.

Clearly the promising new singer had become an established national star, but like most careers, there would also be detours ahead. She left her major record label in 2003, and then the next year signed with a new independent label. Her single, "Bumper of My SUV" became a hit with country radio and led to a new affiliation Dualtone Records. Wright's sixth album, THE METROPOLITAN HOTEL became a Number 7 hit on the Top Independent Albums chart, followed by Vanguard Records' release LIFTED OFF THE GROUND in 2010, the same year as publication of her self-penned memoir, LIKE ME.

Wright approached the writing process for I AM THE RAIN with a new found hope and excitement that a musical and lyrical expression unique to her alone was in her reach. "I spent time in the hospital room with my mother while she was dying," Wright says. "I'd recently written 'At the Heart of Me,' and as my mom listened to the demo of that song, it became clear to me that it was time to start a new record."

The range of songs on I AM THE RAIN reflect a view into an entire lifetime. The first song recorded for the album, "See Me Home," set the stage for the rest of the songs to come. "That song became the rudder of the whole album, feeling like the saying, 'A rising tide lifts all ships.' Except in this case it was the rest of the songs." The lyrics remain the centerpiece of the album:

"Take my hand
Walk me through the valley
I'll fear not, with the sun to warm my face
There we'll stand
In the light of all that shall be
Knowing home has never been a place"

Wright quickly understood this was one of the most moving revelations of the album. It came over her like a wave. "The recordings became a life lesson," she says. "Something dramatic started happening as the album was unfolding. It required me to just take a seat and absorb these amazing musicians in the room. It was then that I could acknowledge that something was being sprinkled in the atmosphere and it made me able to just trust."

Part of the power that Henry brought to the album included drummer Jay Bellerose, bassist David Piltch, guitarists Adam Levy and Mark Goldenberg, keyboardist Patrick Warren, saxophonist Levon Henry, and engineer Ryan Freeland. It was in this circle of players and people that Wright realized she had to change how she related to what was being created. "I needed to get really quiet as we made the album. And I needed to recognize all those special moments in the day as they were happening. Several times during the sessions I felt a warmth wash over me as we were working. I had never experienced anything quite like it before."

In working on the songs that would become I AM THE RAIN, Chely discovered a way to shape not just the life she was hoping to live but also to see all the things that had brought her to this place. “Sometimes the past becomes a stalker, demanding to be acknowledged. And other times it can be a savior, where all the lessons learned are a gateway to the future,” she says.

Nowhere is this more apparent than the song “Next to Me:”

“If the world starts comin’ at me
And my armor rattles loose
If my compass starts to spinnin’
Tell me can I count on you?
To say you’ll stay next to me
Even on the darkest days we’ll ever know
Just stay next to me
Next to me forever please don’t go”

As Wright’s new strength was gathering, she was able to look at her past and not fidget or flinch. Each new recording session offered insights and continued aspiration. “At the Heart of Me” became one of her new mantras:

“Our faith is a well and deep down I can tell
I’m as thirsty as a mortal can be
Silence abounds and is ringing through town
Like a bell swinging high over me
But it won’t matter now
It couldn’t change what I see
If a thousand miles lay between us today
You’re still at the heart of me”

In speaking about the musical and emotional breakthrough of I AM THE RAIN, it is quickly clear that Chely could not have come to this place without writing her honest and telling memoir LIKE ME, where she speaks so openly of a life sometimes lived in the shadows, and the price that demanded. “Something became free in me when that happened. That process of freedom led to a new way of living. Before the book my object in life was to stay concealed, and I tended to write that way. But now I can write from the inside out, and it completely changes what I can do. I was no longer afraid.”

I AM THE RAIN is a new beginning, but one that is built on the bedrock work of a musical survivor. Milestones achieved include working with Joe Henry, writing with him, Edie Carey and Rodney Crowell, singing with Crowell, Emmylou Harris and the Milk Carton Kids, recording a Bob Dylan song (“Tomorrow is a Long Time”); the list continues. Asked to sum up this hugely significant step in her life, Wright doesn’t hesitate. “I believe I’ve given birth to a beautiful new baby and I would like people who see my baby to think it’s beautiful too. That’s how much this new music means to me. I am so very lucky it all came true.”

#