

# Roots music

Sheryl Crow revisits the past with a bluesy new sound. By **Amanda Waas**



The 1990s were good to Sheryl Crow. In 1993, her debut album, *Tuesday Night Music Club*, instantly made her a Top 40 darling, spurning radio-friendly hits like “All I Wanna Do” and “Strong Enough.” She followed up with a string of hits throughout the decade, including the wistful “My Favorite Mistake” and the movie sound track staple “Every Day is a Winding Road.” These tracks were so ubiquitous that even Crow’s most serious detractors can probably sing the entire chorus to “If It Makes You Happy.”

But in the past ten years, the Grammy Award-winning songstress has seemed to focus on her personal life. After a much-publicized relationship (and subsequent breakup) with cyclist Lance Armstrong, surviving a bout

with breast cancer and adopting two sons (Wyatt in 2007 and Levi this past July), Crow is back on the road with her new album, *100 Miles from Memphis*.

The album finds Crow getting in touch with her roots; the name refers to her hometown of Kennett, Missouri. The daughter of two musicians (her father played the trumpet, while her mother taught piano), Crow’s childhood was influenced significantly by music out of Memphis.

“Growing up in Kennett, our radios would pick up the soul sounds out of Memphis,” Crow explains via e-mail while en route to Nashville. “I grew up on Aretha Franklin, Al Green, Curtis Mayfield and the music of Sun Records. Memphis was the big city for us in Kennett.”

In *100 Miles from Memphis*, we find a mature, perhaps more nostalgic version of Crow—less radio ready and more blues rock. Even the album’s bouncy first single, “Summer Day,” introduces muted horns and soulful backing vocals to the fold. Listen carefully and you can pick out Memphis native Justin Timberlake lending his voice to “Sign Your Name,” and the reggae-infused guitar work in “Eye to Eye” belongs to Rolling Stones member Keith Richards.

“Keith and the Rolling Stones have always been supportive of my career,” Crow says. “He’s like family, but I still got butterflies in my stomach when he was coming to the studio to record.”

Crow also pays respect to another famous friend, Michael Jackson, with a spirited cover of the Jackson 5’s “I Want You Back.” Crow became close with Jackson when she toured with him in the 1980s as a backup singer, but the cover wasn’t supposed to be included on the album.

“We were recording a cover of an obscure Marvin Gaye song, and my band just started playing the hook to ‘I Want You Back’ and I started singing,” explains Crow. “The guys in the studio said that I sounded just like Michael and should record the track for the album. It’s definitely my homage to Michael.”

As Crow packs her guitar and prepares to embark on a world tour, she’s making a stop in New York to play Radio City Music Hall in September. “I’ve played all over New York,” says Crow. “My first big show was at The Beacon, but I love playing Radio City. It has such a special vibe.” Whatever vibes we catch while watching Crow onstage—backed by her new blues band—they’re sure to be 100 miles from predictable.

*Sheryl Crow plays Radio City Music Hall Sept 26 with special guest Brandi Carlile. For more information, go to [radiocity.com](http://radiocity.com).*