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MUSIC

SELF-RELIANCE

Lera Lynn finds a new version of herself in *On My Own*

BY OLIVIA LADD

Lera Lynn's forthcoming fifth album began as an experiment. The expressive and versatile songsmith took a song from start to finish — from writing lyrics and

ON MY OWN OUT FRIDAY, OCT. 23. VIA RUBY RANGE RECORDS AND INGROOVES

music, to playing and recording all the parts, to mixing the track with a basic studio setup at home

— without input from anyone else, just to see what would happen. Pleasantly surprised with the result, she continued. As the songs multiplied throughout 2019, the idea to turn her project into a full LP emerged. The result is *On My Own*, out Oct. 23, a record full of vivid and varied textures.

Crafted in disciplined, self-imposed isolation, *On My Own* is the product of a creative breakthrough. It's a striking departure from Lynn's earlier work, whether her widely lauded role in Season 2 of *True Detective* (as a coolly evocative singer who regularly played a bar frequented by the main characters) or her most recent release, 2018's *Plays Well With Others*. *Plays Well* skews toward '70s-vintage pop, featuring nine duets with roots and Americana artists like Rodney Crowell and John Paul White. *On My Own* still carries an innate softness and is at times haunting, but resonant harmonies and electronic drum tracks place the new material closer to the work of Chelsea Wolfe or Sharon Van Etten. The intent and process behind making *On My Own* informed the content.

"For most of the songs on the record, I did not write the way that I have in the past, which is with a guitar, a lot of times an acoustic guitar," Lynn tells the *Scene* by phone. "[For *On My Own*,] I would make drum loops, then find a cool sound on the synthesizer that maybe didn't even stay in the song, but was enough to take me in a different direction than I would've gone with acoustic guitar. I used my drum machine, an old Ace Tone; then wrote the bass line; then wrote the melody; then wrote lyrics to fit. It was kind of a backwards process for me. Usually it's lyrics and melody first."

By maintaining a singular vision from conception to completion of *On My Own*, Lynn achieved a distinctive style, both sonically and thematically, that she wouldn't have otherwise. In changing the methods by which she created, she felt free to challenge herself further. With only a modest amount of prior experience engineering recordings, she met a sharp learning curve and discovered what she was capable of on her own.

"It was really challenging to do in isolation," says Lynn. "I think most of us rely on feedback with art. I learned a lot about trusting my instincts. That's really what this record is all about, for me. You don't have anybody else, you've just got to follow the muse and trust yourself and trust your instinct."

You can hear where that trust pays off right from the start of the album. A spare, steady, mechanical heartbeat emanating from the Ace Tone explodes into the shimmering "Are You Listening?" The song revels in the act of creation, exploring a fantasy landscape that Lynn's imagination generates when she dreams, as she sings: "There's a song that plays for you / Can't you see? / You wrote the music / You sing the melody." Later, over the sideways-sliding groove of "Let Me Tell You Something," Lynn reflects on the downsides of life in a creative field as she offers some career advice to a young person, possibly a younger version of herself. She touches on the lack of financial stability in the music business, but focuses on deeper, longer-lasting harm, singing: "What you feel don't matter

/ Everybody's got something to say / But nobody's got the time to listen to it anyway."

In many ways, making this album helped prepare Lynn for the changes this year would bring, from coping with the restrictions of the global pandemic to caring for her son, who she gave birth to in August. When recording, she kept a schedule to make sure she got work done; before, she'd write whenever the feeling struck. Now, she squeezes in songwriting time while her baby is sleeping. Life will never go back to the way it was before in many ways, but Lynn remains adaptable, and now has experience relying on creativity that works within a structure.

The way *On My Own* came to be is critical, because it forced Lynn to develop new skills and a new way of looking at her music. But

the process also helped Lynn work toward a broader kind of self-acceptance that's just as important.

"I think the overarching theme was me trying to settle into myself. I think that we're all looking for that on our life journeys — how to be comfortable in your own skin and accept yourself. Most of us spend a lot of time looking outside and comparing and pushing and wanting to be more, better, richer, more successful. And I think this record was really an illustration of me working through that process, going: 'OK, this is who I am, this is how old I am, this is my living situation, this is my career situation and it's OK. I'm OK with it. I'm proud of it, and just sort of settling into that.'"

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