



## Sheryl Crow: On the Record

The singer-songwriter just released her final album. But Crow isn't done with making music.

**BY TOMMIE ETHINGTON**

Sheryl Crow has decided to make one final record, something that speaks to her decades-long career. Since her first gig as a backup vocalist on Michael Jackson's *Bad* tour, she's become a rock star in her own right, won nine Grammy Awards, and paid it forward by supporting stars like Kacey Musgraves and Maren Morris. *Threads*, which came out Aug. 30, may be her last album, but Crow tells us that when it comes to making new music, there's no end in sight.

**Q: Why will *Threads* be your last full album?**

A: I loved growing up with records—the actual tangible LPs. I would read the credits, look at lyrics, and dream about the pictures on albums. I also love *making* records, but with technology, the way we put our playlists together now is almost antithetical to creating a

whole artistic statement with a beginning, middle, and end because songs are cherry-picked and put into different playlists. I'm going to continue to make music, but *Threads* felt like a great way to sum up my career by paying tribute to the people who have not only inspired me but also been a part of my creative life. It's also a way to pay it forward and acknowledge artists who are continuing the singer-songwriter tradition of connecting with an audience through truth-telling.

**The track list is impressive. You collaborated with Stevie Nicks, Chris Stapleton, and Keith Richards, to name a few. Is there one song on the album that's particularly meaningful?**

I think “**Redemption Day (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rKg0vz0Hllo>)**” probably holds the most meaning for me. It's a song I wrote 20 years ago, and I put it out at a time when I felt like it was important to that time and moment. Now, with where we are in this state of politics—and even in just the sociopolitical climate of America—I feel like the song has even more meaning. Johnny Cash also recorded it the week before he passed, and to have Johnny's voice on it brings an even deeper and more profound impact.

**Did you edit his original track or mix it for *Threads*? How did that work?**

It's the vocals he did for his demo of that song and his actual recording, but everything else is different.

**So, you wrote the song and then Johnny Cash reached out. Where were you in your career when that happened?**

It was in 2003, if I recall correctly, and I was in my kitchen in Los Angeles when I got a call. This was very soon after his wife June Carter Cash passed, and I sang at her funeral. I'd seen Johnny, and

then, about two or three weeks later, I got a call from his son-in-law saying Johnny wanted to talk to me. He said, “I gave him the song that you wrote called ‘Redemption Day,’ and he would like to record it.” It was very unexpected and, as you might imagine, the most tremendous honor I think I’ve ever had in my life. To have him record one of *my* songs, it was such a thrill and so humbling. I had a conversation with him about the song, and he asked me questions about different lyrics I wrote, what they meant, and why I’d written them. I think because of his approach, we’ve always been able to believe what he sang to be his. He needed to be behind it before he could sing it.

**Did you always know you wanted that song to be on the album?**

I had no idea that I was going to make this record. At the moment where I knew I was making it a collaborative effort, I thought because of everything that’s happening, this song needs to be on the record, and we need to hear Johnny sing it.

**Is there one song from your career that you particularly love to perform?**

**“My Favorite Mistake (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AmIlUKo4dQc>).**” I don’t even know if it’s my favorite song I’ve ever written, but I love performing it. I wrote the song with one of my dearest friends, Jeff Trott, who I wrote a lot of songs with, and it came together very easily. It came straight from the heart. When I perform it, I still feel the way I felt the first time I sang it.

**Thinking about the songwriting process, what do you do if you’re ever feeling really stuck?**

If I’m ever really stuck, I sit down with a book of Bob Dylan lyrics or put on music that I love. Sometimes I’m inspired by new stuff that I hear or a sentence I’ve read. I can also be very inspired with what’s

going on in the news and the way that it makes me feel. That can be a sort of impetus to write a song. But if I'm ever really stuck, I generally will listen to some music I love or read some lyrics by people who inspire me. That generally unjams the log jam.

**Is the music that you listen to more soulful or upbeat?**

It depends. I generally will just put on one of my favorite playlists that has a little bit of everything in it: new stuff, old stuff. I love Clarence Greenwood, Gary Clark Jr., old Rolling Stones, and Joni Mitchell.

**You've had a long career. What did you do early on that set you up for success?**

What has always served me best is to practice, to figure out my instruments, and to just play. I'm always practicing, I'm always trying to better my musicianship and my producership and my songwriting, and I also listen to music. I listen to it with a learning ear as well as with my emotions.

**How many instruments do you play? Is there one you'd love to learn but haven't mastered yet?**

My main instrument is piano. I play a number of keyboards, bass, guitar—acoustic and electric—harmonica, accordion. I can play the autoharp, which is not a very popular instrument at this point. I would love to be a great drummer, but I've not mastered it and I've not worked at it. I think in some of my free time this year, I'm really going to work on getting to be at least an average drummer.

**Coming full circle, you mentioned your love of records growing up. What was the first album you owned?**

The first record I ever owned was *ABC* by the Jackson 5. I got it for Christmas, and we wore it out. We loved *The Jackson 5* cartoon and were huge fans of *American Bandstand*, where it was all about dancing. All of us kids used to dance to that record endlessly. What's really interesting about it is that when I moved to L.A. after being a schoolteacher, my first real playing gig was with Michael Jackson. I sang backup on the *Bad* tour. Isn't that crazy?

*This interview has been edited for length and clarity.*

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**Tommie Ethington is a former editor of this magazine. Email her at [tommie.y.ethington@gmail.com](mailto:tommie.y.ethington@gmail.com) (<mailto:tommie.y.ethington@gmail.com>).**

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