

Joy Lynn White
One More Time

Joy Lynn White's commanding alto can soar with passion, growl with indignation and burn with desire. But it's not just the range and power of her distinctive voice that makes her a favorite of so many well-regarded artists and in-the-know music fans. She also has that indescribable knack for loading each line with nuance and personality; there's something about her delivery that charges each line with meaning so that a lyric grabs your heart or knocks your head off.

That certain something can be heard on "Keep This Love," the leadoff cut on White's fourth album, *One More Time*. Capturing a conversation between two lovers, White suddenly interjects, "Yea yea yea yea yea yea"—it's an unexpected blast of feeling that expresses all the pent-up frustration the woman's been holding back. It's not accusatory or personal; it's just a volatile explosion of pure emotion that communicates what the couple's words can't, and it's stunningly effective—just the kind of thing lifts talents like Aretha Franklin or Van Morrison above their peers.

"I try to write songs that have something to say, that have a strong point of view," says White. "I want to feel a clear emotion when I sing. It lets me play that character for a few minutes while drawing on an experience I've had. If it's real for me, then it's going to be more real for whoever's listening."

The Arkansas native, who was raised in Indiana, reveals that special characteristic throughout *One More Time*. It's there when she's holding a long note on the chorus of "I'm Free," snarling with righteous pride on "Good Rockin' Mama," quietly conveying poignant truths in "Girls with Apartments in Nashville" or bringing layers of complexity to the tough self-examination of the title song.

For another example, check out how she transforms Naomi Neville's classic "Certain Girl," one of two songs on the album White didn't write (the other is a touching cover of Phil Lee's "Just Some Girl.")

By changing the gender to make it “A Certain Boy,” White becomes the first female to record the cheeky New Orleans classic. The song’s had several famous versions, from early takes by Ernie K-Doe, Fats Domino and Clarence “Frogman” Henry to latter covers by The Yardbirds, Eric Clapton and Warren Zevon. White matches Zevon’s swaggering version, singing it with a flinty, flirty sneer that suggests White is southern music’s answer to such take-no-guff rockers as Chrissie Hynde and Joan Jett.

That attitude serves White’s artistry well—even if it has created some speed bumps in her career path. Nashville early on embraced and encouraged White, although eventually her uncompromising ways and brass-in-pocket style proved too stout for an era that preferred sweet-smiling pop-country divas. Still, White’s two ‘90s albums on Columbia Records remain acclaimed collections, predating the success of similarly bold female artists like the Dixie Chicks (who covered two of White’s recordings, “Tonight the Heartache’s on Me” and “Cold Day in July”)

As with many iconoclasts who cast their fate with creative freedom, White found her audience outside strict genre lines, where she can mix-and-match various roots styles into an alchemy all her own.

“I feel like I can be myself when I don’t have to fit someone else’s idea of what will get me airplay,” she says. “I’ve done that, and while I appreciated the opportunity, I felt constrained by it. It felt a lot more natural to let my songs and my arrangements go where they needed to go without worrying about what box they fit in. I wanted to be able to do what felt right.”

She’s been welcomed by such well-known outsiders as Lucinda Williams, Buddy Miller, Dwight Yoakam, Robbie Fulks, Amy Rigby, Iris DeMent and Chip Taylor, all of whom have called on her as a harmony vocalist and opening act. Williams, especially, loves to ask White to join her on tour as a warm-up act. In a special honor, Buddy Miller asked her to fill in for his wife Julie Miller while performing a series of European shows. Her duet with Fulks on “Tupelo County Jail” was a highlight of the Webb Pierce tribute album, *Caught in the Webb*.

White's previous independent release, 1997's grand *The Lucky Few*, was produced in Los Angeles by Pete Anderson and became a No. 1 seller on the Americana charts. The acclaimed roots-rock album, full of searing country soul, revealed how much more powerful White's songwriting and voice could be when freed from the formulas of commercial country music.

White was building momentum while touring after the release of *The Lucky Few* when tragedy struck. A close member of her family had died unexpectedly; the singer put her career on hold to spend time in East Tennessee with her immediate family as they all pulled together after the devastating loss.

Still, she continued to write songs, gaining a long-running song publishing contract with esteemed Welk Music. She eventually returned to touring steadily and contributed vocals to albums by dozens of acclaimed friends. She also took on her first big dramatic role; playing Mother Maybelle Carter in a musical production based the story of The Carter Family. Along the way, she released a web-only album of demo songs, *On Her Own*, that's now in its third printing.

For her return to recording, she went into the studio at the invitation of Kyle Lehning, the famed producer who collaborated with Randy Travis on his classic debut, *Storms of Life*, as well as working with George Jones, Waylon Jennings, Tammy Wynette, The Drovers, Dan Seals and others.

"Kyle was a godsend," says White. "He's such a consummate professional, and he loves working with good singers and strong material. I learned a lot co-producing a record with him. He really went to bat for me across the board, and I couldn't have finished this record if it wasn't for how committed he was to getting it done."

The album includes a stellar core band featuring guitarists Duane Jarvis and George Bradfute, bassist Dave Jacques and drummer Paul Griffith, with White on acoustic guitar and Lehning providing

R&B-style organ accents.

“I wanted to wait for the right situation before putting together another recording,” White says. “Once I started working with Kyle and with this great band, I knew *this* was the right situation.”

The 11 cuts prove worth the wait. Always a critical favorite—reviewer Alanna Nash once described White as “a fiery redhead with a wild-and-wounded delivery and an attitude that says she’s not to be ignored”--*One More Time* puts White back in the spotlight and as a reminder of her one-of-a-kind talent.

Or, as White might put it, “Yea yea yea yea yea yea.”

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