

Lisa Marie Presley 1968-2023

June 20, 2012—

Lisa Marie Presley has lived under the guise of a big top since the time she was born.

Her new album, “Storm & Grace,” picks up stakes and removes the tent.

For her first album in five years, Presley sings with a sense of rural vulnerability not heard on her two previous recordings. “Storm & Grace” (Universal Republic/XIX Entertainment) was produced by Americana music go-to guy T Bone Burnett.

Presley and a five-piece country-folk band that includes longtime Lucinda Williams pedal steel guitarist Doug Pettibone and Presley’s husband, guitarist Michael Lockwood (Aimee Mann), sneak into town for a Wednesday set at the Bottom Lounge on the near West side of Chicago.

The songs on “Storm & Grace” breathe through Presley’s new collaboration with songwriter Richard Hawley, formerly of Pulp but better known for his seven outstanding folk-soul albums. His 2001 solo debut, “Late Night Final,” was named in honor of news vendors hawking the Sheffield Star evening paper. What’s not to like about that?

Presley sounded media-wary and braced in a recent phone call from Philadelphia, where she launched the two-week “Storm & Grace” promotional tour — until Hawley’s name was brought up.

“I’m always happy when somebody knows Richard,” she said. “He’s easy to talk about because I just love him. My husband was a huge Pulp fan and worked in Sheffield, where he met him. We were thinking of different abstractive people to write with just to see what happens when I write. My husband had the idea.”

Presley, 44, and Hawley, 45, met. Hawley had never written with anyone besides Jarvis Cocker of Pulp.

“We were super nervous,” she explained. “But we wrote ‘Weary’ [a swampy ballad with sweet hooks] in an hour and a half. It was a breakthrough point for

me as a writer, because I was always anxious to overdo everything or overproduce or over sing it — basically arguing with myself in writing a song.

“I decided to keep it simple and go with a nice melody, and that’s what he is so amazing at.”

Presley writes the lyrics, Hawley writes the music. Hawley plays guitar and they hum together.

“Every time we got together, it happened more naturally,” she said. “Richard and I write these sad ballads. One day, we tried to write an uptempo song. He said he’s always getting ripped for writing too sad, and I have a definite tendency to be dark when I’m writing. We tried to write an uptempo song, and I don’t think either of us liked it.”

Presley created 30 songs over an eight-month period. “I also wrote with [Brit songwriter] Ed Harcourt, Fran Healy [of Travis] and other less known writers. T Bone and I recorded 16 in 12 days, so there’s more in the can.

“I didn’t have a label. I didn’t have a plan. Nothing was contrived. But I had a dream to work with T Bone. I mentioned it to Simon Fuller [founder of XIX Entertainment], who was helping me at the time. He sent the demos to T Bone.”

The creator of the “Idol” imprint, Fuller was a director of CKX, where he maintained creative control over assets including the estate of Presley’s father, Elvis. Once Burnett got the demos, he told Presley “the vibe” was already there.

“I wondered what the daughter of an American revolutionary music artist had to say,” Burnett said in a statement. “What I heard was honest, raw, unaffected and soulful. Listening beyond the media static, Lisa Marie Presley is a Southern American folk music artist of great value.”

After a celebrated marriage to Michael Jackson and a 108-day union to Nicolas Cage, Presley has lived a life that has been more storm than grace.

How do her collective experiences inform her writing — and singing?

“That’s my only inspiration,” she answered. “This is a particular time where I deconstructed and reconstructed. The album came from that process.”

The “Storm & Grace” album cover was shot in a woody area next to Graceland in Memphis, where she lived on and off until her father died in 1977.

“I was never allowed to go in those woods when I was little,” she said. “I went to Graceland for Thanksgiving, and it happened organically, as everything else did. It was just, ‘Let’s shoot the album cover while you’re there.’ I was there for five days, so it was. ‘Let’s go where I’ve never been allowed.’ ”

Presley has ownership of Graceland and her father’s personal stuff. She helped curate the current Graceland exhibit “Elvis: Through His Daughter’s Eyes” that has more than 200 items representing the years she lived at Graceland.

“It was fascinating and emotional because I didn’t know a lot of that stuff was there, to be honest.” she said. “Anybody, when they were little, to have it all pulled out in front of you, everything you did as a child is very ... interesting, anyway. Things like my golf cart key, that blew me away.”

Now Presley’s own children ride the Graceland golf carts, and they love spending time at the bigger-than-life mansion.

Presley, Lockwood (her fourth husband) and their twin 3-year-old girls divide time between rural England and the United States. “England has such a flavor and taste for tradition and culture,” she said. “They have so much. They are inspired by the roots of American music, and I think that inspired me since we moved there.”