

Madeleine Peyroux's extraordinary journey is one of music industry's most compelling. Eight albums and 22 years since her debut *Dreamland*, Peyroux continues to challenge the confines of jazz, venturing into the fertile fields of contemporary music with unfading curiosity.

Peyroux's new album, *Anthem*, finds the singer-songwriter collaborating with writers/musicians Patrick Warren (Bonnie Raitt, JD Souther, Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, Lana Del Rey, The Red Hot Chili Peppers), Brian MacLeod (Sara Bareilles, Leonard Cohen, Tina Turner, Ziggy Marley) and David Baerwald (Joni Mitchell, David and David, Sheryl Crow), who are also the basic rhythm section players on the album. Together, they cast a sober, poetic, and at times philosophical eye on the current state of the world.

Produced and co-written by Larry Klein, the album came to life during the pivotal 2016 US elections, with the writers absorbing a "constant stream of news" over many months. The "consciously not too preachy" songs, fuse Peyroux's, at times political outlook, with glimpses into her personal world. Honed and patiently refined with fellow writers they mix the public with the personal, striking that perfect equilibrium of dark humour and compassion.

*Anthem* is an album born out of the team being "together in one room, musing over world events and letting personal experiences spark ideas". David Baerwald's sadness over the passing of poet John Ashbery, ignited thoughts of much admired figures lost over the years and paved the path for *All My Heroes*. Baerwald's loss gave rise to feelings of awe at these figures' trailblazing ability to guide and "light fires in the shadows", but also brought to light their very human vulnerability.

Inspiration for the evocative *Lullaby*, written by Baerwald, Klein, MacLeod, Peyroux and Warren, came from "the image of a solitary woman in the midst of a vast open sea singing to her child, or possibly herself, as she faces the chasm of the world." With engaging empathy, the song paints a haunting picture of the displaced person's desperation, as she is tormented by memories of "a time before the war", in a boat paddling towards the unknown.

*Anthem* weaves the colourful stories of people confronting life's challenges in a multitude of ways. With pathos and a hint of irony it laments over financial tribulations in *Down On Me*, speaks of disappointment and unfulfilled dreams in the bluesy *Ghosts of Tomorrow* and delivers a scathingly poignant social commentary in *The Brand New Deal*. Coming ten years after *Bare Bones*, the singer-songwriter's previous album of original songs, *Anthem* finds Peyroux wiser with finer articulation powers. Inspired by her idol Leonard Cohen's ability to "suffer for the work, but still present the listener with just a friendly thought", Peyroux sends a spiritual but clear message of hope, optimism and resilience in the face of a turbulent reality.

There are two covers in this album. Paul Eluard's WW2 poem *Liberté*, and the title track, Leonard Cohen's monumental *Anthem*, which also marks Peyroux's third interpretation of the iconic poet's work.

Soon becoming Peyroux's "personal anthem", Cohen's soulful masterpiece "tied together all the stories on the record", with uncanny relevance and topical worldly observation.

It was Cohen's astonishing ability to tap into the human psyche and "make you think about things without forcing you into it", that was the underlying thread throughout the project, leading to a more fluid style of writing, "that is about saying something rather than saying everything."

Anthem's lighter tunes include *On My Own* and *On A Sunday Afternoon and 70's sounding Party Tyme* which "has some darkness to it."

A key track on the album is Paul Eluard's poem *Liberté* which came to Peyroux's attention when a family friend requested she contribute a song to the documentary *On the Tips of One's Toes (Sur La Pointe des Pieds)*, telling the story of her gravely ill son and the family dealing with his fatal illness (Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy). A well-known poem in France and recently set to music by French rocker Marc Lavoine, "*Liberté* was already in the air following the Paris terror attack". It came up for Peyroux and Klein as they were trying to put music to a sequence in the documentary showing the young boy going on daily outings and activities. It evoked questions about the parents' ordeal of "living with the knowledge that their son will not live a full life", and triggered thoughts of "life's greatest questions about mortality, overcoming adversity and man's place in the grand scheme of things".

The 21-verse poem was edited down to fit the album's format and its stanzas adapted, before Peyroux and Klein wrote their original composition. Delivered in French and encompassing the entire human experience, *Liberté* begins with the lines "*On my school notebooks, On my school desk and the trees*", to convey the essence of childhood and growing up. It goes on to touch on adulthood, romantic loneliness, and the many facets of human life, before finally speaking of illness, death and recovery. "With every verse Eluard mentions different places, imaginary and real where he would write 'the name' but the name itself remains a mystery until the all revealing last line "*I was born to know you, To name you, Liberty*". Under Klein's sensitive production, the arresting poem assumes an enchanting folksy simplicity, with only Klein's acoustic guitar and Warren's atmospheric synth strings to accompany Peyroux's mesmerising voice.

*Anthem* is Peyroux's "biggest project to date", with the artist investing many months of hands-on involvement in the studio, "exploring processed sounds and editing in post tracking. Special in that it was written with the group of musicians/writers who also played on it, "this album was about discovering the original songs as they were being recorded" and mastering the courage to "let the songs choose their own path." The new album includes several songs bearing Peyroux's distinctive, instantly recognizable style including *On My Own* and *Sunday afternoon*, but *Anthem's* spirit was that of exploring new styles whilst resting safe in the knowledge that "if you are loyal to yourself, there should always be a thread running through your music."