

# DAR WILLIAMS MY BETTER SELF

Lyrical *MY BETTER SELF* is a political album, in the most personal way. It combines songs of love and hate with tales that illustrate some of the many social and environmental issues that Dar Williams holds dear to her heart. "I'm thinking about where we are right now in history," Williams says. "The other common theme to this record is that the songs all put stuff I find important out on the table. Less metaphor and more me. As to the album's name," she goes on, "it's best illustrated by the image on the cover, that your better self is not always the one you plan out or even motivate yourself to be."

"As much as I love to control what I write and perform, I know my better self is not an intentional construction," Williams explains. "It's a spontaneous creation that I stumble across while I try to tell the truth," she candidly admits. "I hope my audiences have seen that. I try to keep a window open in performance and in recording just as I do in songwriting."

Dar took a new approach in the recording of this album. "I wanted to bring in members of my touring band who I have never recorded with before, along with the team I'd worked with on my last two albums," Williams explains. Featured are Ben Butler (guitars), Stuart Smith (guitars - currently with The Eagles), Steve Holley (drums/percussion), Julie Wolf (keyboards), Mike Visceglia (bass) and Rob Hyman (keyboards). "They each had their own ideas of how to go about recording this album so my role was to stay out of their way as much as possible. When I got home from the studio and listened to it," Williams continues, "I heard all these little things they had added to make a song come together and build momentum. I was really excited to hear these incredible details that were put in without my really noticing at the time." She sums it up by saying, "There was just this generosity of spirit to the recording."

*MY BETTER SELF* was recorded in Woodstock, New York's Allaire Studios' "cathedral of sound" and consists of ten original tracks and three aptly chosen cover songs. The album, produced by Stewart Lerman (The Roches, Loudon Wainwright), includes amazing guest performances by Soulive, Ani DiFranco, Marshall Crenshaw and Patty Larkin. It continues an evolution in the sound and vibe from Dar's previous albums. The songs on this record are filled with blasts of guitar, xylophones meshing with organs, and interesting musical nuances that stretch across the record's landscape. In a way, this can be described as an updated version of a classic '70s record, the type that headphones were created for.

One of the three carefully chosen cover tunes on *MY BETTER SELF* is the innovative reworking of Pink Floyd's "Comfortably Numb" in a stunning duet with Ani DiFranco. "I always thought a woman should record it," Dar Williams explains, "So I decided to do it, but I thought it needed another woman. Ani was my dream choice and she just nailed it," Williams says. "The song is a commentary on who we are in the aftermath of the last election, no matter who you voted for. On one level it is about a dream which seems to have died in our society and the ultra convenient numbing I am witnessing these days."

"Two Sides of The River" finds Williams working in a new musical genre. "As strange as it seems to be writing a blues song, "Two Sides" came into my head like a fever dream as I was leaving New Orleans in 2003 and it wouldn't leave until I finished it." Backed by Soulive, the track features the energy and musical passion that band has become renown for; the jazz/blues guitar riffs of Eric Krasno and the tight and powerful rhythm section of brothers Neal (organ, piano and keyboard bass) and Alan (drums) Evans.

"So Close To My Heart," a song dedicated to Williams' young son, is a mysterious blend of percussive instruments and haunting guitar parts accenting Williams' intimate vocals. "The Hudson," an ode to New York's great river, finds Williams joined on vocals by singer/songwriter Patty Larkin. Perhaps the most hypnotic and magical music on *MY BETTER SELF* can be heard on "Blue Light Of The Flame," a blend of picked string instruments, lush keyboards, and Williams' voice hovering weightlessly above it all.

Another of the covers is Williams' version of Neil Young's "Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere." The track begins like a bluegrass march with mandolins and snare drums and turns with little hesitation into the stomper Young intended. Williams and Marshall Crenshaw trade verses while beautifully harmonizing over the chorus. Crenshaw goes on to add a ripping guitar solo, which Williams claims is one of her favorite parts of the whole album.

Tying *MY BETTER SELF* together is "Echoes," written by Jules Shear, Rob Hyman and Stewart Lerman. "It's like a '70s song, just innocent but with all this detail and muscle added in to its underlying sweetness. The chorus says 'Everything you do echoes all over the world'. It's a feeling thing, not a thinking thing," Williams adds.

In addition to Williams' work on this most recent recording, she has been lauded for her debut as a novelist. Her debut, *Amalee*, a compelling coming of age story for young adults, garnered a slew of excellent reviews. She has just completed the sequel, which will be out next year.

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