

Elle King

LOVE STUFF

Frank and fearless, tender and rowdy, **Elle King's** debut album, LOVE STUFF marks the true arrival of the young singer/songwriter/guitarist/banjoist as a pop force to be reckoned with. "I always thought I knew who I was," says King, "but now I'm really learning what kind of person I want to be. And with that comes who I am as an artist, because the songs come from who I am and what I go through."

She recorded these twelve songs with such remarkable producers as Jeff Bhasker (Fun., Kanye West), Eg White (Adele, Sam Smith), and Jacknife Lee (R.E.M., U2), and guest musicians including Mark Ronson and Patrick Carney of the Black Keys. The first single from LOVE STUFF, "Ex's & Oh's," was #1 Most Added at AAA radio upon release; *Billboard* called the track "catchy and clever."

The album is the follow-up to 2012's acclaimed *The Elle King EP*, which was praised by such outlets as *Esquire*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Entertainment Weekly* and included the single "Playing For Keeps," which was featured as the theme song for VH1's *Mob Wives Chicago* and chosen for the national TV ad campaign for *Mad Men*. Following the EP's release, King toured extensively with the likes of Ed Sheeran, Train, and Of Monsters and Men, pushing back her work on new music.

"In my mind, I was going to just go make an album a few months later," says King. "I had super-high expectations and was putting so much pressure on myself. But the EP happened so fast—I never expected how quickly you can get music on TV, I went on *David Letterman* for the first time, which was insane and incredible and something I'll never forget. And then opportunities kept coming up, so I toured pretty straight for a year, and if I had a few days off, I'd get into the studio with somebody."

Those periodic sessions took her around the world, from London to Malibu, Memphis to New York City. "I have so many influences, I wake up in different moods and want to play different music, and in some wacky way, we tied it all in," says King. "We found the people that got me, that believed in me and wanted to be a part of it—after we did one song together, they wanted to do another."

Asked what she learned from working with such a wide and accomplished range of producers and musicians, she has an instant answer. “Never shut out an idea—you always have to try anything, twice! I kept an open mind and then not only got to work with geniuses and get incredible songs, but I also got great role models and friends. And through laughing, jumping for joy, kicking, screaming, I feel like I finally found my sound.”

The results, as heard on *LOVE STUFF*, display King’s grounding in rock, blues, country, and pop styles, and a sweeping emotional road map—the stomp of “Where the Devil Don’t Go,” the sexy sweetness of “Make You Smile,” the swagger of “America’s Sweetheart.” She notes “Sweetheart” as a breakthrough, saying that producer/co-writer Martin Johnson (who she calls “an insane pop genius”) pushed her harder than any other collaborator. “Faster, higher, louder—I was singing so hard I had to sit down between takes. That’s the fastest I’ve ever played banjo; I have no idea how I’ll do that onstage.”

Raised in rural Ohio, King pinpoints the day her life changed to her ninth birthday, when her stepdad refused to get her the album by the pop-reggae star that she wanted and instead gave her the first album by hard-rocker girls the Donnas. “I put that on and that was it,” she says. “I wanted to play rock and roll and be a girl and *do it*. I started listening to the Runaways and Blondie—all the rad chicks.”

She moved to New York City at age 10; after getting kicked out of school, she headed to California, then returned to New York, and then to Philadelphia for art college. In the midst of her far-flung and hell-raising travels, King started playing guitar at age 13 (“a friend of my stepdad’s taught me, and I learned stuff by, like, the Yeah Yeah Yeahs and Otis Redding”) and then later picked up a banjo, inspired by the Hank Williams and Earl Scruggs records her family listened to.

It was during her time in Philadelphia that her music took a different turn, and her songwriting got more serious. “I was living on my own, getting into way too much trouble, and really getting my heart broken for the first time,” she says. “I’ve never been shy, but that’s when I started singing in parks and busking.”

King also had an epiphany about her approach to her instruments. “When I picked up the banjo, I would play country music,” she says. “But I saw a band in the park one day, and these guys played the banjo just as an instrument, not stylized in any kind of mold, and I got it—just play it because it’s beautiful.”

The songs that started emerging got her noticed and led to the making of *The Elle King EP*. But even after relocating to Brooklyn and pursuing a music career in earnest, King was no more able to settle down. “I haven’t been able to sit still since I could walk,” she says. “I followed a country singer to Nashville, got my heart broken again but decided to stay there and try to figure it out. I took a year to really think, and then left and I haven’t stopped—I drove 30 thousand miles in the first six weeks. But if you can’t handle that, you’re not gonna make it. I want to put my feet in every country, I just want to go out and play. I’m a gypsy.”

With this outlook, she singles out the *LOVE STUFF* track “Song of Sorrow” as an especially personal and meaningful statement; “I can’t seem to find my way back home,” she sings. “It’s been a hundred years/I’ve no idea which direction to go.”

“That’s about where I’m from and the journey of finding yourself,” says King. “Since I’m constantly moving, home is a state of mind, not a place. I’m always searching for where I feel at home.

“That’s why I have such a sense of pride about this album,” she continues. “I worked my ass off and kept trying my hardest. I feel unbelievably lucky. I still can’t believe I’m getting away with it.