

CHASTITY BROWN

As the daughter of a blues musician, **Chastity Brown** was born with an innate ability to channel wrenching circumstances into beautiful, uplifting songs. But after surviving the isolation of the early pandemic and a global racial reckoning that was set off mere blocks from her South Minneapolis home, even she was surprised to hear the way her latest album was taking shape.

"It's a love album, in a way I didn't plan on," Chastity says. The songs on *Sing to the Walls* blossom around the ears like a lush garden of flowers, with **Chastity's** expressive voice and expansive melodies supported by intertwining, twinkling tendrils of atmospheric sounds. Even the titles hint at the album's sense of optimistic yearning, from the dreamy opening track "Wonderment" to her ode to healing a broken heart post-breakup, "Curiosity," to the pulsing promise of "Hope."

With the exception of "Golden," a searing indictment of white complacency and a cathartic release of post-uprising rage that comes halfway through the album, **Chastity's** new release, *Sing to the Walls*, is ultimately an album about hope, connection, and love—an ode to the sweetness of life, even amid a pandemic, even in a city that's experienced so much pain.

"I think it's such audacity," Chastity. "It's almost like how funk music came after Malcolm, Martin, and everybody got murdered in the '60s. Then the '70s popped off, and there was funk! This isn't funk, but it feels like that same kind of audacity. I just want to feel good. Straight up."

Like so many artists who endured 2020, **Chastity's** instinct was to turn inward, at first out of self-preservation, and then because the new songs kept coming and coming. Since finishing her last album, 2017's *Silhouette of Sirens*, she estimates she's written nearly 100 new songs, 10 of which are on *Sing to the Walls*. The album was partially recorded in Stockholm, Sweden with the revered session drummer and producer Brady Blade, with additional production and mixing by Chris Bell, and the rest was completed at **Chastity's** own home studio with her longtime drummer Greg Schutte.

For the first time, **Chastity** also served as the lead producer on some of the tracks, and co-producer on all of them. *"I just was like, why can't I do it? It just meant that everything took so long. But it was like, Where am I going anyway? The way I've worked since the pandemic began, as far as songwriting and arranging and composing, I've never been so productive. Whatever tour life becomes, I want to carve out writing time—I'm addicted to writing. And it's like such a cool high,"* she says.

Between writing sessions she's been vibing to chilled-out, forward thinking soul artists like Leon Bridges, H.E.R., SZA, and Daniel Caesar, taking their cue to expand beyond genre into a wide-open space that encompasses her appreciation of all Black American musical artforms.

“I want to poke at what the blues is,” Chastity reflects. “It has a lot of stereotypes, like it’s mostly only played by blue-eyed white guys now. But what about Bessie Smith, and Ma Rainey? I feel so closely connected, in a pure, undeviating lineage, to the heritage of being a Black, queer blues woman. I want to share this music with them, and say that I’ve listened, and I’ve done something new.”

Sing to the Walls is a sonically expansive album; it digs down deep into the roots of Americana, folk, and soul music, but **Chastity’s** stories are delivered in a style that feels remarkably timely, modern, and forward-thinking. In her mind, she envisions her creative work as a flower blooming out of these winding roots, seeping up the influences from all that has come before her to create a sound that is distinctly her own.

In the same way, her lyrics seek to reach across the great divide. “I will sing to those walls, hope it gets through / And I will sing to your scars, they need healing too,” **Chastity** sings on the album’s title track, a pandemic love song about breaking through all of the physical, emotional, and social barriers that have been constructed around all of us in recent years. By the next track, “Like the Sun,” she breaks through into a melody that rises like a wide-open prairie sunrise—a heart-rending moment that demonstrates her talent for expressing big, beautiful ideas in her music, and to create songs that radiate bliss.

Even amid the chaos of 2020, and while delivering the release-valve verses of “Golden,” she remains steadfast. “I’ve got joy even when I’m a target, if you think that’s political don’t get me started,” Chastity sings, demanding to know: “Why have I got to be angry?”

*“This album does not serve sorrow,” Chastity says bluntly. “And in that way, it’s like me trying to be Zora Neale Hurston in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. What matters to me is my survival—and for my survival, it’s been necessary to try to fuck with some joy.”*

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