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**RUFUS WAINWRIGHT and AMSTERDAM SINFONIETTA LIVE**

**Track by track – by Rufus Wainwright**

Side A

**How Deep is the Ocean**

This song is by the great Irving Berlin. My husband Jorn and I have a very special connection to him and this song. We own a house close to the ocean in Montauk on Long Island. The house was built by Helmut Kresa who was Irving Berlin’s musical assistant as Berlin could not read or write music. So Helmy as he was called would notate songs and melodies that Berlin would often sing into the telephone. So maybe this song was even notated in our house in Montauk. I want to think that you can hear the waves of the Atlantic ocean in this song. My sister Martha sang this song in our garden during our wedding ceremony.

**Excursion a Venise**

This song was written by my Aunt Anna McGarrigle and was released on the French album of my mom and aunt (the Canadian folk duo Kate and Anna McGarrigle released). I have always loved this song. I grew up in Montreal which was heavily francophone at the time. If you spoke English in school too often you would not be allowed to go on the end of year school excursion. I never made it. This was one of the songs I enjoyed performing the most and the Amsterdam Sinfonietta really proves that they are game for any type of music. That is what I loved about them.

**Triste Apprêts**

Rameau is one of my favorite composers. His sense of melody and rhythm are unparalleled. This aria from Castor et Pollux is maybe one of the most profound songs about loss and mourning.

**Go Leave**

This is one of the best songs that my mom wrote. It is a deeply personal song about saying good bye to her husband, my father who is making off with another woman. I am actually not totally sure who the other woman is who is “better than me – or at least stronger” as my mom wrote. I am in awe of this song and being to express such a deep emotion in such a simple form at such a young age. She is basically mourning the love of her life in her twenties. She knows that she will never love like this again. I went from the Rameau straight into this song in the concerts as they are in the same key and I like to string together songs sometimes so the audience has no time to breath and applaud but you go from one emotion into the next. These songs were written over two hundred years apart but they are really about the same thing.

**Gay Messiah**

This song recounts a totally botched party weekend I was planning to have decades ago on Fire Island where I got robbed by a drag queen and watched parts of a crashed plane fall into the ocean at dawn. I have never been back to Fire Island since but I got a great song out of it. It also earned me a parental advisory sticker on the album Want Two that I thought is normally only reserved for rappers. I love the arrangement that the Amsterdam Sinfonietta did. It is so celestial. The song is a liberal anthem against religious ideologies and dogmas.

**Who by Fire**

This is the first time I sang this song by Leonard Cohen. I grew up with his music. It is based on a Hebrew Prayer chanted at Yom Kippur reviewing the Book of Life and deciding the fate of every soul. But the last line in each verse “Who shall I say is calling” is almost a break from religious faith and an appeal that we ourselves cannot judge others. I think Gay Messiah and Who by Fire back to back is a good combination as well.

Side B

**Argentina**

This is a love song to my husband. I was on a tour in South America and saw all these amazing countries and he was up in cold Toronto in Canada and I missed him. It is a simple but the sentiment is very honest and deep. There is a sprinkle of typical Wainwrightian tongue in cheek attitude in there. I usually sing this song at the piano by myself but the strings add a longing and desire to the song that I find incredibly intriguing.

**I’m Going In**

This is the emotional center of the entire record and the show. Brace yourself when you listen to this song. It is by the great Canadian singer songwriter Lhasa de Sela who died just a few weeks before my mother at the young age of 38 also from cancer. This song is about her own death. Her version is around 6 minutes and I stretch it to almost 9 minutes. When my mom died, this was the only song that I could listen to for a long time. You have to give yourself over to this song. This is not a song that you listen to in the car or cleaning up.

**L’Île Inconnue**

Berlioz is probably my favorite composer and I grew up with Regine Crespin’s version of Les Nuits d’Ete. It has always been a dream of mine to sing this song. I think you are either going to love my version or hate it. I wanted to put it out there. If you do not challenge yourself as an artist, there is no reason to be an artist.

**Arachne**

I wrote this song for Nana Mouskouri and she sang it a few times I believe. She loved it when I played it for her. This was the first time I performed it myself in public. The structure of the song is a Tarantella. Arachne was a mortal who claimed that she could weave better than the goddess Athena. They had a contest and Athena tore Arachne’s work into pieces and she killed herself in despair. Athena then transformed the rope into a cobweb and the Arachne into a spider who basically then continues her art throughout eternity. To me it is the story of revolt against rules and expectations. Arachne seems to lose it because she dies but ultimately her art prevails. She continues to weave her narrative. The arrangements are very evocative, you hear the spinning of the cobweb, the screeching of the spider legs on a cold surface etc.

**Amsterdam**

I was afraid to sing this song. I am a very different singer than Jacques Brel. You kind of have to become a demon when you sing his songs, you have to become possessed by the song. I am not that type of singer who explodes, I am someone who goes deeper and deeper into the emotional space of a song but Brel forces you really into this eruption and I feel I did get there in the end. It is the polar opposite to Lhasa’s song.

CD

**Foolish Love**

The legendary Van Dyke Parks did the original arrangements for this song. I owe a lot to Van Dyke as he gave my demo tape to Lenny Waronker who signed me to Dreamworks. It is one of the first songs that I wrote that defined my singular sound, a combination of opera, Broadway and pop. It carries the Wainwright DNA.

**All I Want**

I sang “All I Want” at a concert for Joni Mitchell’s 70th birthday in Toronto right in front of her before then performing it with the Amsterdam Sinfonietta. It shows yet another facet of their incredible playing and I think especially with this song the fact that they are all standing when they are performing comes in very handy. You got to be on your feet to not screw up the rythms and tempi of this song. It is quite hellish to sing. It is a struggle, just like the song is a struggle about love and whether one has to forget oneself to love another. It is totally giddy and jet completely insecure and both of these emotions are in the structure of the song.