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QUESTIONS FOR SHERYL CROW

Agit Pop

The singer-songwriter talks about writing eco lyrics, how she was done in by a roll of toilet paper and what's great about touring with her 8-month-old.

Q As one of the most politically outspoken figures in American pop, did you intend to convey any kind of message by scheduling the release of your new album, "Detours," on Feb. 5, Super Tuesday? There was absolutely no correlation. Honestly, I don't know what record is sold anymore. Some people buy it, and some people download it illegally and don't pay for it.

Does that bother you? I'm sad that people feel like music should be free, that the way that we do it is not valued.

Don't you feel valued enough? It's more about consciousness. When music comes out the way of friends burning CDs, there's not that understanding of the work that goes into the making of an album.

Your new album updates the tradition of protest music, bemoaning the havoc wrought by the Iraq war, Katrina and even economic policy. "Gasoline" is surely the first song about high gas prices. It's probably the first, and it could possibly be the last. It will be perceived as a futuristic song about people who would take to the streets and take back our freedom from the oppression of gas prices.

Last spring, you were held up as a parody of environmental correctness when you proposed restricting the use of toilet paper to one square per bathroom visit. What was that about? I think it's a fantastic and eye-opening example of how the media is operated by political figures, of how Karl Rove was humiliated in the media. Within 24 hours, he was able to humiliate me and take any sort of credibility away from me.

What are you saying? You think Karl Rove leaked the toilet-paper story to the press after you and Laurie David sparred with him about global warming at the White House correspondents' dinner? I cannot tie him directly to that leak, but within 24 hours of our exchange, as we were leaving D.C., it was on the CNN ticker tape: "Sheryl Crow has proposed that we legislate toilet paper to one square."

Did you ever actually suggest that? It was always a joke. It was part of a shtick. It was part of a comedy routine that Laurie and I were doing on the "Stop Global Warming College Tour."

You recorded your latest album on your farm in Nashville, where you moved two years ago, after you and Lance Armstrong broke off your engagement. Why'd you choose the South? I have a lot of family down here. I had a house in L.A. for 20 years, when I got diagnosed with breast cancer, I decided it was important for me to be near my family. I was about to adopt, and I wanted to have my family around to help me raise Wyatt.

Was there a history of breast cancer in your family? No, and that's why I am a good child for early detection. Be diligent about mammograms. I had a lumpectomy six and a half weeks of radiation. I'm in good shape now.

Right, you're a new single mother at age 45. I am loving every second of it. Wyatt is 8 months old. He's got a lot of personality.

Will you take him on the coming tour for your new album? He's already been out a bit. He sleeps in his crib on the bus. He's passed around. He's very social. And he takes the dogs — two yellow Labs — and it's just like taking the whole household like a big traveling family circus.

As a nine-time Grammy-Award winner, how important are prizes to you? When my last Grammy, I felt like, The bus is leaving in the morning, and it's time to get to work. INTERVIEW CONDUCTED, CONDENSED AND EDITED BY DEBORAH SOLOMON

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