

ANNE WILSON

REBEL

*“Here’s the church, here’s the steeple
Inside you’ll find all my people
Sunday school teacher, parking lot smoker
The six weeks pregnant and the six weeks sober
Sisters and brothers, stealing each other’s cable
Breaking bread and butter, folded hands at a fold-out table...”*
-- “Southern Gospel”

Anne Wilson is convicted. At a time when country music once again welcomes felons and outlaws, the Kentucky-born sensation is a whole other kind of insurrection. Power vocals forward and hard-charging rhythms driving her album, Wilson offers a high-impact bluegrass-rooted take on country that embraces faith the way so many artists revel in truck beds, cold beers, hot girls, good times, and long nights.

Her world is filled with the very same people. Gravel roads, porches, Sunday meals, beauty shop drama, above ground pools, Pyrex potlucks, and Dollar Trees. But where so many songs lead to a fantasy of good times, Wilson sets her sights on something more.

Unapologetically real, the young woman who blasted into public consciousness as a teen with “My Jesus,” her powerful response to the death of her 23-year-old brother, continued growing up through the songs she writes and the truths she shares. Recognizing passion doesn’t always fit in neat little boxes, that realization delivered a very special freedom for the wide-open force of struggle, joy, and embracing life for all its worth. It fires *REBEL* with a fervor that’s as contagious as it is uplifting.

“I was raised in a family where my mom taught me my voice matters, that I can have whatever dream if I’ll believe in it with faith and work,” Wilson says of the unconventional cocktail that defines her music. “She allowed me to ask questions, figure things out, speak freely, which allowed me to find my confidence. Most people go with the flow, following the crowd and going with what’s easy or the trend. That’s not me.”

Indeed. There’s the sweeping rush of the title track, the brassy stop-start rhythm that drives “Songs About Whiskey,” the ruminating Appalachian dobro’n’banjo-anchored verses that builds into a massive choir/full band chorus on “Sinner’s Prayer,” the simple piano/vocal profession that unpacks the Gospel of John in “3:16,” and the plucky, throw your arms around it “Southern Gospel,” that conjure a world where faith isn’t just a rock, but the fuel that makes the world go round.

Though only 22 years old, Wilson’s maturity levels how she views her environment. Having grown up around rural Kentucky, how you see is as important as what you think. Having been told she was too country for Christian radio, too faith-based for country, she dug deep inside, then doubled down. Working with producer Jeff Pardo and manager/songwriter Matthew West, she challenged herself to take her music as far as she could, to be the most authentically Anne Wilson possible.

“There was a moment when I wondered if I was too country for Christian music and maybe too Christian for country music. I felt a little afraid that I didn’t fit in any box. But then it kind of fired me up because that’s the point! I don’t want to fit into any box. I want to be uniquely who God made me to be and I’ve got to stand up for what I believe and the kind of music I believe in. I don’t want to change who I am to fit in. Not in the music industry, and not in this world.”

When Anne Wilson talks, the momentum grows, the truths spill out everywhere. In that same way, “Rebel” came to anchor and inspire *REBEL*. “I remember thinking ‘If being a follower of Jesus makes me a rebel, because Jesus was a rebel,’ I’m gonna stand up for my faith. In that moment, it all kind of clicked. I wrote the song, then the whole viewpoint of the record came into focus. We had that title on a white board, and every song we wrote after came from that question: what does it mean to be a rebel?”

A myriad of things if you listen. “Red Flags” offers advice to the “Hey Girl” Nation and “Strong” gives a window into resilience and surrender modern life requires. There’s the refuge in this life that shows what heaven will be like in “Dirt Roads In Heaven,” while the pumping, Dolly-esque “God & Country” offers a layer-by-layer unpacking of what Wilson’s made of.

When thinking of “God & Country,” she remembers, “I wanted to write a song that explains who I am as an artist. I was writing with Matthew, Jeff, and Trannie Anderson, and we talked about what the message was and how to put all the pieces of me in it.”

Those pieces inform the self-declaring grace of “My Father’s Daughter,” the yearning price paid that unpacks the cost of chasing a dream in “Milestones,” and healing, hopeful midtempo “Rain In The Rearview” that invokes Carrie Underwood’s “Jesus Take The Wheel” as it encourages the listener to “drive, baby, drive, baby, drive ‘til it shines on you.” With a herculean note that crowns the bridge and final chorus, there is catharsis and a stunning sense of emerging.

“The day we wrote ‘Rain In The Rearview,’ I’d started sharing my story, all the feelings of grief after my brother died, and the idea popped into our heads. ‘We need to write a song about what it means to move forward from pain, hurt and loss, and to put one foot in front of the other daring to believe that the sun will still rise tomorrow.’”

That triumph over the trials of life tempers everything on *REBEL*. “For me, it was ‘let’s take the listener on a journey of what the last two years have been like. Let’s have some fun in the beginning with ‘God & Country’ and ‘Songs About Whiskey,’ then let’s bring it back to what matters most and end on a soft note.”

That intentionality makes *REBEL* a solid collection of music. From the moment “My Jesus” blew up the internet, Wilson began attracting fellow creative forces who recognize the ardor of her talent. Christian music legend Chris Tomlin shares “The Cross” with her, and 2023 Country Music Association Entertainer of the Year Lainey Wilson co-wrote/sings on “Praying Woman.”

“We joke we’re the long, lost Wilson sisters. Our families are very similar, and we were raised with similar values,” she begins, then turns to Tomlin, “He loved the message of ‘The Cross’ and the lyrics made him choke up. It makes you feel like you’re doing something good with your life when Chris has that kind of response.”

For the almost one billion streams, Grammy nominations, and Dove Awards, the Grand Ole Opry appearances and intense tours, there’s still plenty that leaves Wilson awestruck. But she is just as resolutely, absolutely a girl from outside Lexington whose grandfather’s farm has been in the family for over a hundred years, who knows the value of the values she was raised with.

Whether the rambling “Country Gold” with CMA Song of the Year winner Jordan Davis, reclaiming small towns from those flying over who’d dismiss what’s there, or the hushed prayer “Out of the Bluegrass,” Wilson’s roots go deep and are strong. Of the album’s closer Wilson shares, “It’s the story of growing up in the country, the values of country music, and I really like the feeling I get when I listen to it. I like the simplicity of it, like pulling out of the bluegrass and into the state of Tennessee; that fiddle is one of my favorite things. It’s sweet and sacred, brings it back to my roots.”

UMG Nashville Chair & CEO Cindy Mabe, a woman also raised on small town heart and values, recognizes the conviction that moves through these songs. She believes in Wilson unequivocally, writing, “She is a star, not an algorithm, not a replica, not a metric that you cannot connect with or believe in... Anne is not meant to fit into an existing format, but rather to build her own. She’s here to bridge and widen audiences.”

In some ways, *REBEL* makes it so simple. Take what you need, enjoy the music – and feel the emotions that swirl around that dusky, torchy power mezzo-soprano voice sharing her life in songs. But in the end, *REBEL* is a call to action. A bold musical statement and an even bolder message of faith.

“For me, this is an invitation,” she says with conviction. “If someone’s listening to my record simply because they love music...” Her voice drifts off for a moment considering the possibility, “I want them to feel seen. I want them to feel joy from the fun, but then also the joy from faith. Because even when it’s hard, that will get you through.”