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REASON TO HOPE

NEW YORK'S REGINA SPEKTOR
GETS KEYED UP

Heather Seidler: Text
Adrianna Petty: Image

Let's get the facts straight—Regina Spektor is a girl, and she plays the piano. This does not make her a quirky troubadour à la Tori Amos, or a tortured waif like Fiona Apple, nor a Cat Power catastrophe of emotional distress and teary self-deprecation. Instead, the New Yorker-via-Russia is a rare bird who can pull off sadness without dipping into melodrama. She is precocious and adorable and vulnerable and real. When she sings about how "I have dreams of orca whales and owls but I wake up in fear" you actually want to know what the hell she's talking about. She's sensual, not sexual, and it's admittedly difficult not to fall in love with her just a little bit. Regina Spektor is 26-years-old and she belts out impossibly smart, Dylan-worthy lyrics in a voice that can switch effortlessly from full-bodied yawp to childish whisper and everything in between.

Her latest, *Begin to Hope*, takes the stripped-down aesthetic of her first two albums and adds a dash of studio magic—it's slicker to be sure, which only adds welcome ornamentation to her distinctive sound. "There's only so polished I can go, even if I tried really hard to be a pop star," she says. "It was my first time ever in the studio with a little bit of time and a budget. It's sort of like making your meals at home out of scraps—we have basil and an egg beater and this and that, so OK, I'll concoct this, because this is what I have to work with—and then somebody takes you to Dean & DeLuca and is like HAVE FUN!"

Whereas too many musicians make a play at modesty while secretly nursing egos the size of developing nations, Regina seems to take a sincerely humble approach to what she does. "I care a lot that my music finds its way to people and hopefully it's of some use to them," she says. "While I'm making it, I don't care. But as soon as I'm done, my

next instinct is to give it to someone and say here's this thing I made, please take it so I can make another one!" It's hard not to picture her crouched over a piano in her Soho apartment, cobbling together songs like miniature arts-and-crafts projects to send to family and friends. Her work is precious in all the right ways—confessional without being self-centered, shot through with a wicked sense of humor that can make tragedy and heartache seem almost worthwhile. She's one of the few musicians who can write about the traumas of the past with a certain warm, grinning distance.

After her upcoming tour—during which she'll be playing *Begin to Hope's* songs solo—it's unlikely that Regina Spektor will remain a closely guarded secret. "You know what freaks me out? When they make the lights really bright on you, especially in big theaters," she says. "It's weird. You're just like on the edge of the ocean in the night, this never ending darkness. You have to wait til the end of the song when people clap, and then you know they're out there." ■

www.reginaspektor.com
www.anthem-magazine.com/music