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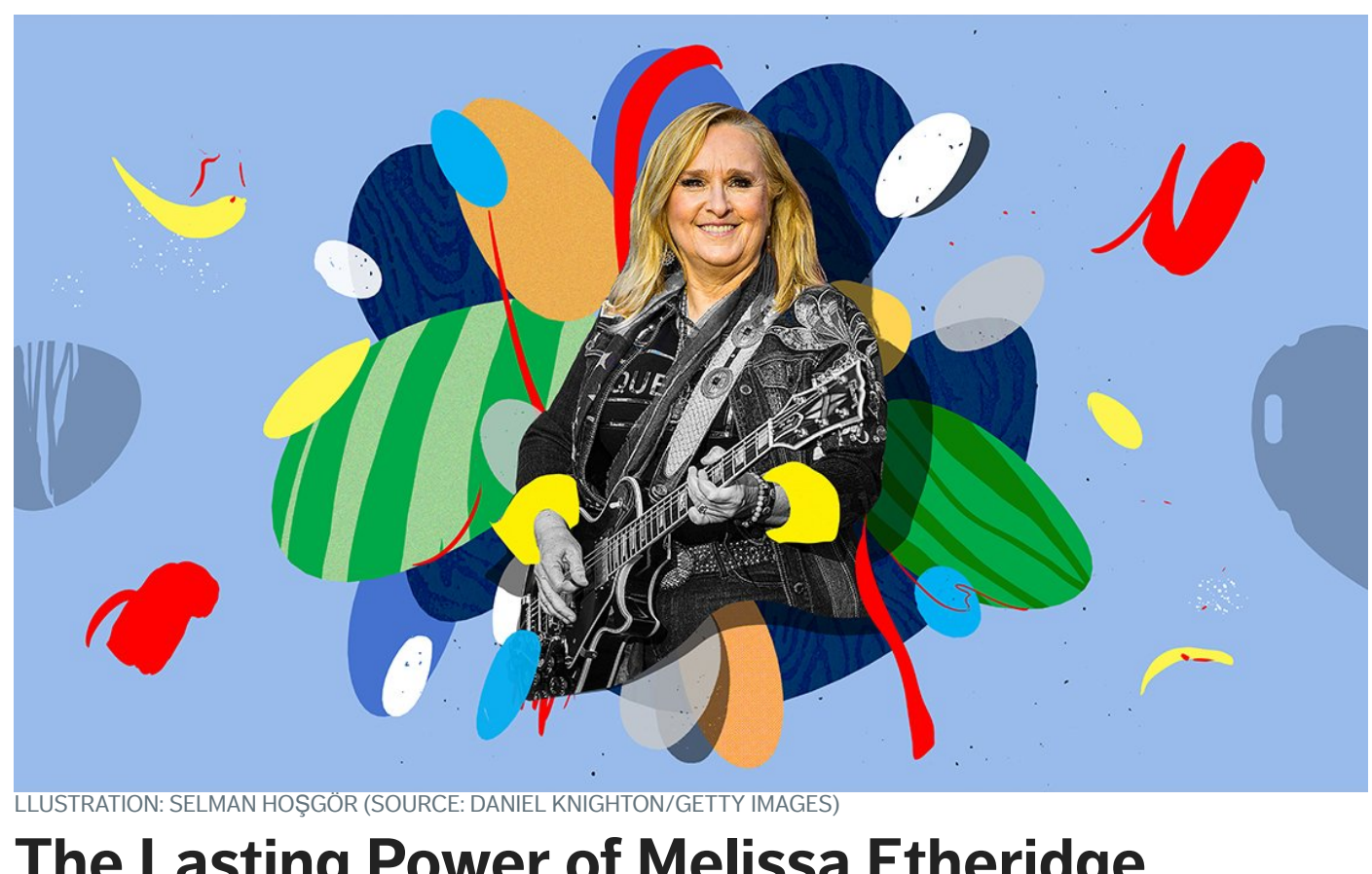


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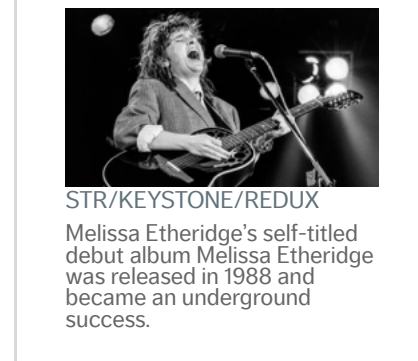
The Lasting Power of Melissa Etheridge

Rock star to release album full of songs she's finally ready to share
by Jennifer Oladipo, **AARP Members Only Access**, August 13, 2021 | Comments: 0

Melissa Etheridge just might have perfected the art of renewal. Having enjoyed official rock star status since 1993 with hits like "Come to My Window" and "I'm the Only One," the Grammy award winner has recently been putting a gleaming spit shine on more than three decades of deeply personal music.

Etheridge's catalogue is full of frank, sensual, often fiery songs. You could get the impression from her fierce vocals and ecstatic guitar riffs that she never holds back — but she has. In fact, her forthcoming album, *One Way Out*, is full of songs she was too timid to share when they were recorded in the '80s and '90s.

"I didn't have anyone in the record business or company that was telling me, 'don't do that,'" Etheridge says. "It was me who self-censored. I heard a song like "For the Last Time" and I didn't want the world to know how sexually frustrated I was at the moment."



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Melissa Etheridge's self-titled debut album *Melissa Etheridge* was released in 1988 and became an underground success.

Although she'd been discovered while performing exclusively in Los Angeles lesbian bars, she also shined "Wild, Wild, Wild" because she hadn't yet spoken publicly about being a lesbian.

"I remember really loving ["Wild, Wild, Wild"] and going, but that's just really obvious that I'm singing to a woman because nobody ever says those things about a guy."

Similarly, "As Cool as You Try" and "Save Myself" felt too overtly feminist. "You know the way we [women] tried to make ourselves smaller in the late '80s," she says.

But, today's conversations about gender and sexuality are radically different, and Etheridge is confident they'll hit a different note. Plus, at 60, she just doesn't care as much what people think about her younger self — the songs are just fun to sing.

She found solace revisiting her music while sequestered at home during the pandemic. She also wanted a unique way to keep sharing it with fans in the same predicament. So, Etheridge TV was born. Unsatisfied with streaming on Facebook, she launched a production studio in her garage with the help of her wife, television writer and producer Linda Waller. Etheridge performed covers as well as songs from her own catalog, and held live chats five nights a week. And she relished the challenge of mastering new technology to create a top-notch viewer experience.

"It was a real learning curve for me," she says. "A lot of us over 50 kind of escaped on the technology. We know enough, but we don't really know what we're doing. Learning about streaming, cameras, lighting, sound, everything — it was delightful. I love that I can still learn things at 60."

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ELIZABETH MIRANDA

Her older songs stay vibrant on the slick new platform. Viewers can see her play and record multiple instruments on a loop, layering real-time music samples until she's re-created the sound of a full band. It's something like what we might have seen when she got hands-on with the production of her 2004 album *Lucky*, in which she experimented with technologies that were changing the sound of popular music at the time.

On her garage stage, Etheridge even pushed a few technical boundaries that caused her tech support to scratch their heads while helping execute her vision. That included shooting from five camera angles, with one camera mounted on her guitar to show off her fancy finger work.

Etheridge TV has also been a balm in the aftermath of losing her 21-year-old son, Beckett Cypher, to an opioid overdose in May 2020. He had struggled with addiction for four years.

The experience led her to launch the Etheridge Foundation to fund research into the causes and effects of opioid addiction. A longtime cannabis advocate, she hopes to eventually include plant-based therapies. Etheridge relied on cannabis throughout her own battle with breast cancer in 2004 and 2005. She hopes marijuana will be legalized by the time her foundation is ready to help.

"As we get up and enrolling, the world is changing on that front, too. So, I think the two will meet when it's right," she says.

Her 2019 album, *The Medicine Show*, reflects her exuberant advocacy for plant-based medicine. Yet, it also includes the heart-wrenching ballad "Here Comes the Pain," her response to watching her son become swept up in a larger epidemic. That compulsion to both champion and reflect, to celebrate and provoke, has been a signature of Etheridge's music.

Despite her frequent promise that audiences will leave her show feeling better, she's eager to tell hard truths. That's why former vice president Al Gore tapped Etheridge to contribute the theme song, "I Need to Wake Up," for his climate change documentary "An Inconvenient Truth." That sonic rallying cry won Etheridge an Academy Award in 2007.

Before that, "Tuesday Morning" told the story of David Bingham, one of four men who retook United Airlines Flight 93 from hijackers on Sept. 11, 2001. Then in 2016, she released the single, "Pulse," in memory of mass-shooting victims at the eponymous gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida.

They can take a year or two to marinate, but these anthems for the unsung are important to Etheridge. She's always thinking about what song the world needs next: "I think I want to be known as an artist that made a small sense of something. I put a story, a time, a moment in, in life, in our history, into three minutes, and you can maybe open it up and feel the emotion again."

And, with all the turmoil the world has seen, especially recently, she promises her anthem about this time in history is already percolating.

In the meantime, she'll be on tour. Etheridge decided she wants a new look this time around: classic, all-black rock 'n' roll. But she also wants to be comfortable. The solution was to spend a week dying favorite clothes she already owned.

"I learned so much," she says proudly. "You can dye cotton, linen and denim; they're very good."

It's another way Etheridge has chosen to reinvent and emerge with something new, while bringing the best of what she's already got.



ELIZABETH MIRANDA
Etheridge's new album, *One Way Out*, comes out Sept. 17 and includes frank, sensual and sometimes fiery songs.

Melissa Etheridge's Crowd-Pleasers Spotify Playlist

Singer-songwriter Melissa Etheridge shares her current favorite songs from various artists. Plus, she starts the list with a new song from her upcoming album, *One Way Out*.

- One Way Out performed by Melissa Etheridge**
"Have to feature at least one of my songs! Its from my upcoming album; this was recorded years ago, actually, but the time is right to share it with the world."
- Thunder Road performed by Bruce Springsteen**
"I love Bruce so much — this is one of my favorites."
- Up on Cripple Creek performed by The Band**
"Regardless of what you're doing (relaxing at home, driving, hanging with friends), this song just hits the spot."
- Dance to the Music performed by Sly & the Family Stone**
"The ultimate feel-good, get up and dance song!"
- Rhiannon performed by Fleetwood Mac**
"Can't ever go wrong with Stevie Nicks."
- Black Horse & the Cherry Tree performed by KT Tunstall**
"So, so catchy — loved this song since the first time I heard it."
- Stompa performed by Serena Ryder**
"One of my favorite contemporary artists out there — clever to name a song that encourages audience participation!"
- Girls Go Wild performed by LP**
"A GREAT driving song! Not hard to imagine driving down PCH in a convertible with the top down, blasting this one."
- That Was the Whiskey performed by Antigone Rising**
"I'm blown away by the incredible career these ladies have carved out for themselves; they're an inspiration."
- Lucky Stars performed by Lucy Spraggan**
"An amazing talent that more of the world needs to know about."
- The Story performed by Brandi Carlile**
"I'm so thrilled to see the success that Brandi has enjoyed — couldn't have happened to a more deserving and incredible artist!"
- A Change Would Do You Good performed by Sheryl Crow**
"My old friend — always loved the groove on this tune."
- Jane performed by Jefferson Starship**
"A blast from the past — their current vocalist Cathy Richardson is so underrated as a performer."
- All Right Now performed by Free**
"Such a badass tune — who wouldn't want to pick up a guitar and be in a rock band after hearing this?!"
- Come to My Window performed by Melissa Etheridge**
"Will leave you with one more tune of mine!"

See instructions below on how to add the playlist to your phone or tablet.



GET THE PLAYLIST

Spotify code to scan for Melissa Etheridge's playlist

Every playlist on Spotify has its own unique code, similar to a QR code. Called Spotify Codes, these bars make it easy to add a playlist to your Spotify app on your device. Here's how:

- Download and open the free Spotify app on your phone or tablet.
- In the app, tap Search.
- Click the camera icon.
- Scan the barcode above, then tap the arrow to listen.

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