



torch singer

DON'T CALL HER A THROWBACK. ALTHOUGH SAMANTHA SHELTON'S MUSIC PAYS HOMAGE TO THE GREATS OF ERAS PAST, IT'S STILL THOROUGHLY MODERN. BY CRYSTAL MEERS. PHOTOGRAPHED BY KEVIN ZACHER

Maybe it was during the opening ukulele chords on "Across the Sea," or the whistling solo on the closing track, "Heaven." Or perhaps it was hearing her charming trumpet impersonation on "Everything Was Lost." It's hard to pinpoint when, exactly, but while listening to Samantha Shelton's debut album, *Are You Kidding Around?*, the image of her as a songstress from another era popped into my head.

Which explains why, as I stood in line at a coffee shop in Silver Lake, Los Angeles, I scanned the room for a young Hollywood chanteuse done up old Hollywood style; a modern day Rita Hayworth with a touch of June Carter Cash.

"Yeah, I wake up in the morning and put on my smoking jacket, then lay on my chaise drinking brandy Sidecars all day," says Shelton,

who until now has been best known as one half of *If All the Stars Were Pretty Babies!*, the cabaret sensation she created with fellow actress-singer Zooey Deschanel. But dressed for the heat wave in a lightweight cotton button-down and shorts, Shelton is apparently a mere mortal after all.

Raised in the once-small, dusty town of Eagle Rock, a stone's-throw away from L.A.'s hip Eastside, by a folksinger mother and director father, Shelton seems to be one of those girls who was born to be a performer. "I never get nervous," she says. "If you were to ask me to sing right now, I would do it." A pause. "But don't ask." Early on, her experience harmonizing with her three sisters in the back of the family's VW bus brought her to talent shows, followed by art schools, and finally led her to movie roles (*ShopGirl* and *White Oleander*), and television spots (*Judging Amy* and *House*). "I'm constantly looking for ways to express myself, so whatever [there is to do], I'm like, 'Yes!'"

Her latest form of self-expression is a full-length record and she has found a way in which, she says, "the many chapters of Samantha Shelton could come out." An amalgamation of distinct influences, including country crooners Willie Nelson and Emmylou Harris, jazz legends Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong, Big Band swing, and music from the early 20th century, the highly stylized songs are all over the musical map. "I just let whatever flows through, flow through," she says.

And although Shelton penned everything on the album, she's quick to share credit for its lush sound with her collaborators. "When I listen to it, I hear the other musicians." Starting with producer Sam Farrar (*Phantom Planet*), an old friend of Shelton's, the liner notes team with familiar names: James Iha; Jason Schwartzman; and James Valentine (Maroon 5) among them. "It was just a thrill to hear them make the songs so much cooler than I had ever imagined," Shelton says.

Now Shelton plans to take her show on the road. "I'm feeling pretty adventurous," she says. But what that will *look* like she's not quite sure. "Since *Pretty Babies*, I've scaled back a bit," she says, "not quite setting my hair in steam rollers, but I do have the ability to take a lot of risks right now. My friend was just saying that she wants me to go onstage in all '60s mod one night and the next go out in an apron. Everyone will have to just come and to out."



the black parade

SCOTTISH BAND GLASVEGAS ARRIVE IN AMERICA WITH DOUR TALES AND SWEEPING SOUNDS. BY CRISTINA BLACK. PHOTOGRAPHED BY JULIAN GILBERT

James Allan is slumped in a leather seat—dressed all in black, hair slicked back in a Morrissey-style pompadour—in the back of a plush van careening through Manhattan traffic on the way to Radio City Music Hall. Tonight his band, Glasvegas, will open for Echo and the Bunnymen in front of more than 5,000 people. Right now, though, the 29-year-old lead singer and guitarist is enjoying a rare respite from the whirlwind that has taken over his life since Glasvegas became Britain's hottest new act. "It's all been a bit psychedelic," he says.

It has indeed been quite a trip. The former professional footballer is from Dalmarnock, a neighborhood in the east end of Glasgow, Scotland, and he wears the city's inscrutable accent like a badge of honor. Unlike some British artists, who seem to sing in American accents, Allan proudly lets his brogue shine through his band's shoegaze-y, majestic wall-of-sound rock. The group's sound is a mash-up evoked by their moniker: Allan dubbed the outfit Glasvegas to signify the working class grit of his hometown and the showmanship of Sin City. The band has already been compared to the Jesus and Mary Chain, but also nods firmly to the '60s soul-pop helmed by Phil Spector, whose music Allan fell in

love with a few years back. "I had just moved into a new flat," he recalls. "And the only things in there were a bloody old CD player and [Spector's] box set, *Back to Mono*." Allan had long loved orchestral music for its mysterious nature, so when he was cut from Falkirk Football Club and out on the dole, the dabbling songwriter was free to devote his undivided attention to developing his proletariat tunes into large-scale symphonies.

The formula would prove a winning one. In September, Glasvegas—Allan, guitarist Rab Allan (they're cousins), bassist

Paul Donoghue, and drummer Caroline McKay—entered the U.K. album charts at No. 2, with only Metallica's latest keeping their self-titled debut from the top spot. A series of DIY singles (including the exhilarating "Go Square Go!") had already lodged their sound in the hearts of the British masses, leading *NME* to declare Glasvegas "Britain's best-loved band."

It's a lot of hype for a new group to live up to as it arrives in New York to make a play for stateside stardom. But Allan doesn't seem nervous about the

task. "Ultimately, you're bringing your words and your taste and your personality somewhere else," he says calmly, demonstrating his knack for expressing grand subjects in simple, matter-of-fact terms. As Glasvegas' sole songwriter, he has penned beloved tunes about broken families ("Daddy's Gone"), troubled kids ("Geraldine"), and the crushing guilt of infidelity ("It's My Own Cheating Heart That Makes Me Cry"), but he won't elaborate on his themes. Asked about his deadbeat father, he says, "I've written a song about it, haven't I?" His eyes hidden behind black Wayfarers, he adds,

"And it's not very subtle." Allan is wearing the same dark clothes and sunglasses a few days after the Radio City gig, onstage at the far more modest Lower East Side venue Mercury Lounge. When he addresses the crowd between songs, the audience members shush each other and listen hard, but it's no use. No one, save for the few Glaswegians in attendance, can really seem to follow his onstage banter. But that's just fine, because, when the band blows into another massive hit, its epic sound is life affirming in a way that words could never be.

