

Anna Waronker *California Fade*

Listening to *California Fade* is a welcome respite from the doldrums of pop. The warm vocals are the instantly recognizable musings of indie rock vanguard and veteran songwriter **Anna Waronker**, but the sounds that frame the familiar voice are something altogether new. That's not to say that casual listeners haven't heard this level of song writing and production before, they just haven't heard it like this. Waronker isn't content to rest on her laurels and play the same brand of rock we've come to expect from her. In an era defined by tested and targeted songcraft, *California Fade* is the work of an artist unafraid to tread new ground and shed preconceptions.

Anna Waronker's new album began as a follow-up to her first solo record, *Anna by Anna Waronker*. *California Fade* was to be a continuation of the unabashed pop/rock her fans have come to expect, but it evolved into something refreshingly different. "I felt like I was hiding behind distortion," Waronker explains, "It was like I was hiding behind a structure of what I thought I did. I wanted to strip it away." What's left is raw honesty and thoughtful introspection. What's added is lush instrumentation and resolute production. One of her most infectious new tracks, the powerful "**Leaving Home**," was originally written as a hard rock song. Not content to settle for the expected, Waronker made a risky promise to herself: "No guitars allowed on this." The gamble paid off and the track is one of the highlights of her career. Though outstanding guitar melodies do appear elsewhere on the record, courtesy of **Pat Smear** (Foo Fighters, The Germs), **Josh Klinghoffer** (Red Hot Chili Peppers), and **Smokey Hormel** (Beck, Johnny Cash), Waronker is clearly determined not to rely on old tricks.

Several years have passed since **Anna Waronker's** debut as a solo artist, but she's been wearing plenty of hats all the while. As a composer, she's scored for television (*In the Motherhood, Help Me Help You*) and film (*What We Do Is Secret*). Her original songs have appeared on *Grey's Anatomy* and *Big Love*, and she has collaborated with celebrated acts such as **Jemina Pearl** and **Panic at the Disco**. Waronker's most recent career turn has been as a playwright. *Lovelace: A Rock Opera*, co-written with sister-in-law **Charlotte Caffey** (The Go-Go's), made its premier at Los Angeles' Hayworth Theatre to sold-out audiences in 2008 and 2009. The sung through rock opera follows the tumultuous life of Linda Lovelace, from the height of her unexpected fame as the star of *Deep Throat* through her triumphant turn as a women's rights advocate and mother. *Lovelace* recently made its UK debut at the 2010 Edinburgh Festival Fringe. "I'm really enjoying finishing and tweaking *Lovelace*," Waronker notes, "We wrote new material, which was worth it but really hard." Waronker and Caffey's efforts have resulted in rave reviews and multiple awards. *The Los Angeles Times* dubbed *Lovelace* a "candidate for the most original musical since *Spring Awakening*." The duo has also been honored with

a win for **Best Musical Score** at the *Back Stage Garland Awards*. Currently, plans are in place for *Lovelace* to thrill audiences again in 2011.

Lovelace is **Waronker**'s most recent collaboration, but she's certainly no stranger to sharing the stage. She began her career as the frontwoman and principal songwriter for the seminal alternative rock outfit **That Dog** (that dog.). Waronker formed That Dog in 1991 as an outlet for a break up with her high school sweetheart. Waronker (guitar/lead vocals) developed the unique sound that the band became known for through her eclectic harmonic sensibility. She enlisted high school friends, sisters **Petra** (violin/vocals) and **Rachel** (bass/vocals) **Haden**, to fill out the group's signature three-part harmonies. Drummer **Tony Maxwell** joined in 1992, and their self-titled, major label debut was released two years later on DGC (Geffen) Records. Two studio albums (*Totally Crushed Out!* and *Retreat From The Sun*) and tours with the likes of Beck, Weezer, and Blur followed. Despite widespread critical praise and no shortage of name-checking from famous friends, That Dog disbanded in 1997.

Following the breakup, **Waronker** had some important choices to make. She explains, "When I quit **That Dog** I thought, either I try to 'make it' via major labels and focus on 'selling units,' or I can do it myself and reach people directly, on my own terms. Ultimately, I chose to do it myself and, though it's harder to reach people without the big machine behind you, it's a better fit for me." In 2002 she formed her own independent label, **Five Foot Two Records**, with **Charlotte Caffey**. The imprint released Waronker's critically acclaimed debut, *Anna by Anna Waronker* ("a knockout punch" – Rolling Stone), alongside The Muffs' *Really Really Happy* and the long awaited re-issue of Redd Kross' *Neurotica*. Waronker adds, "It wasn't about the number of people I would reach; it was about reaching anyone and how it affected them. That matters to me more." Nevertheless, her debut reached plenty of people and she enjoyed a new level of ownership over her music. She recalls, "In That Dog, I wanted to do every single thing myself. When it came down to it, the idea of playing, recording, producing, and then putting out my own record? I liked that idea too."

Anna Waronker's independent streak has had a profound influence on her maturation as an artist. She's written and performed all of the tracks for her new album, *California Fade*. The stirring "**Beautiful Life**" opens the album with choral harmonies assembled from Waronker's own layered vocals. *California Fade*'s harmonies recall those she pioneered in **That Dog**, but they bring something exponentially bigger to the listening experience. Her growth, both sonically and as a songwriter, has led her to give up a little of the control she has cherished as a solo artist. Waronker says, "If I'm stuck on something, I like to back off. Now I kind of like to back off and hand it to somebody that I trust, which is scary and very different, but it's been great." Two of the people she trusts are her husband, bassist/producer **Steven McDonald** (Redd Kross, OFF!), and her brother, drummer/producer **Joey Waronker** (Beck, Atoms for Peace). She notes that working with her husband "came about organically. With Steve, I would say what I wanted and I knew that he knew what I meant." Consequently, McDonald ended up co-producing tracks like the poignant "**What Do You Do?**" and the standout rocker "**I Don't Wanna**" with frequent collaborator **Josh Klinghoffer**. Waronker feels that her

brother Joey's production efforts on the epic title track, "**California Fade**," and the euphonic "**Spinning Out**" "took it to a whole other level." She adds, "Often times if you work with family or friends it can be weird. But, in my case, it wasn't and hasn't been. It's actually been really positive." Cellist **Tanya Haden** (sister of Waronker's That Dog bandmates Petra and Rachel), drummer **Ryan MacMillan** (Matchbox Twenty, The Push Stars), and violinist **Gabe Witcher** (Merle Haggard, Emmylou Harris) round out the talented cast of friends.

Anna Waronker is a singer/songwriter who has lived through the alternative frenzy of the 90's and carved out a niche of her own in the crowded and convoluted digital age. Her new album, **California Fade**, is a milestone effort by an artist who has transcended categorization. The artist and the album offer a true alternative for those searching for songwriting and production that deliver familiarity with a look forward.