Written by Jeff Ignatius
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After singer/songwriter Rachael Yamagata was freed from her contract with Warner Bros., she called producer John Alagia about making her third album. She didn't send him songs to consider, and they didn't discuss material. The next day, they were making arrangements to get equipment and musicians to his house in Maryland.

"Within a few weeks, we were ... actually doing it," Yamagata said in a phone interview this week, promoting her November 12 performance at the Redstone Room.

Moving quickly was a response to "several years of kind of being in this holding-pattern experiment with major record labels," she said. "It was a lot of leap-before-you-look scenarios. I just knew that if you got the right people in the room, we could make it work."

And the right people wanted to help. "I think people look at me maybe as an underdog of sorts, always wanting good things for me," she said. "A lot of my peers I think have felt the frustration with me about 'Where's your next record?' or 'Why aren't you on the road?'"

Yamagata patched together funding from a variety of sources: a distribution deal, money her father had set aside for her wedding, and contributions through PledgeMusic.com .

The result is *Chesapeake*, which AllMusic.com noted shows Yamagata in a "more hopeful state of mind" than on her previous two albums, both well-regarded. While some critics have found the upbeat tone a little saccharine, most reviews have said that she pulls it off. BlogCritics.org wrote : "Yamagata's honesty ('Full On') proves intoxicating, and her joyfulness ('Saturday Morning') is addicting.

Thanks to well-crafted songs and a voice to die for, her latest is delicious optimism." And the *Washington Post* said : "Her throaty vocals add grit to over-sweetened numbers such as 'You Won't Let Me.' The album's sense of style wavers, but Yamagata's voice and sensibility hold things together."

A personal favorite is the slinky "Starlight," which adds doubt and a confident challenge to the equation: "I jumped from a moving train just to keep you / Would you do it for me?" That track and "Even If I Don't" and "The Way It Seems to Go" pair Yamagata's nimble, undeniably magnetic voice with punchy arrangements – casting her as kin to Fiona Apple. (And on the Muppets tribute *The Green Album*, she lays bare the poignancy of Gonzo's "I'm Going to Go Back There Someday.")

Yamagata said she already has a six-song EP in the works that she hopes to release in the next four months, and it seems likely that fans won't have to wait years between albums as they have in the past.

She was only able to release one studio full-length between her 2004 solo debut (*Happenstance*) and the new independently released album, which came out last month. "It's been insane if you kind of bottom-line it in that way – how often have I been on the road, how many releases have I had?" she said. "The time delays have been ridiculous ...

"I couldn't have seen it coming. I wish I could [have]. I think the industry has imploded within the time frame of me living within it. It started out great and got more difficult along the way, purely because I think everyone's trying to figure out how to survive. Even with my first record, I think I was on five different permutations of RCA."

Once she was released from that contract, she signed to Warner Bros. – which put out her 2008 set *Elephants ... Teeth Sinking Into Heart*. "The only reason I signed with Warner Bros. was because I really, really, really believed in my A&R guy and the people I met at the company, and they've all since been fired," she said. "So I made it through years of rounds of regime changes, which is nice in that people don't want to let me go; they still think there's something there that they want to stand behind. But it's also been a Catch-22, because it hasn't led to the whole point of doing music, which is to make music and then tour the music. It's been incredibly frustrating. ...

“Each time I’ve come into a record, I’ve had 120 songs to mess with. ... I’ve had the material to at least release one a year.”

Yamagata said label machineries often worked against her ability to run with her songs – even with *Chesapeake*. “Frankly, I got dropped as a result of some of these songs,” she said. “They were all in play to make a record, even while I was on Warner Bros.” That process, she said, often involved feedback from different levels of management. “There just gets to be too many people in the room weighing in about how successful something may or may not be. All of these labels are just trying to figure out how to sustain themselves, and mixing that with songwriting is a dangerous thing. ...

“I think there’s a shelf life for analyzing songs and being able to record them and have them sound fresh. ... If I got too intellectual and self-doubting about them, I wouldn’t have been able to go into a studio and think that they had substance. So I had to sort of play mind games with myself and forget any other outside commentary on them and just focus on playing them.”

Rachael Yamagata will perform on Saturday, November 12, at the Redstone Room (129 Main Street in Davenport). Mike Viola will open. The show starts at 9 p.m., and tickets (available from RedstoneRoom.com) are $15.

For more information on Rachael Yamagata, visit RachaelYamagata.com .