Sheryl Crow - Detours (2008)

1. God Bless This Mess 2:09
2. Shine Over Babylon 4:02
3. Love Is Free 3:22
4. Peace Be Upon Us 4:22
5. Gasoline 5:07
6. Out Of Our Heads 4:27
7. Detours 3:29
8. Now That You're Gone 3:51
9. Drunk With The Thought Of You 2:39
10. Diamond Ring 4:10
11. Motivation 3:47
12. Make It Go Away (Radiation Song) 3:23
13. Love Is All There Is 4:01
14. Lullaby For Wyatt 4:08

Nothing puts life in perspective like a brush with death, and that truism is brought into blazing relief on Sheryl Crow's sixth album, Detours. Crow survived a battle with breast cancer in February 2006. Around that same time, she separated from fiancé Lance Armstrong and, roughly a year later, she adopted a son. That's a decade's worth of life packed into two years, but these highs and lows -- or Detours as she calls them -- have led Crow to produce her liveliest, weirdest album since 1996's messy masterpiece Sheryl Crow. On that record, Crow shook up her success by undercutting the retro-rock of Tuesday Night Music Club with loping looped beats and a skewed lyricism that kept even bright tunes like "A Change Will Do You Good" slightly off-kilter, but ever since that album her records grew increasingly mannered, as she whittled away her eccentricities. All those eccentricities return on Detours, partially due to that tidal wave of life events, but also to the revival of her relationship with producer Bill Bottrell, the man who helmed Tuesday Night Music Club. Bottrell and Crow had an acrimonious split during the making of the second album -- several of their collaborations did make that record,

including "Maybe Angels" and "Hard to Make a Stand" -- and while Sheryl sustained her stardom, no producer let her be as loose or revealing as Bottrell, as he helped give her pop tunes odd, distinguishing touches and kept her ballads spare and haunting. These gifts are put into sharp relief on Detours -- perhaps a shade too sharp, actually, as the album is divided into a half of careening protest pop and a half of moody introspection, which may showcase how Bottrell captures Crow's distinct moods, but doesn't quite give this album the classicist flow of her first records. Even if the album slows down a bit too much on its second stretch -- the one containing unadorned confessionals of broken engagements ("Diamond Ring"), cancer ("Make It Go Away [Radiation Song]"), and adoption ("Lullaby for Wyatt") -- the individual moments all work according to their own merits, while that first half contains Crow's most compelling music in years. Much of this is explicitly political -- references to war, petroleum, and New Orleans all run rampant -- but compared to her sometimes didactic public speeches, her socially conscious writing is surprising, filled with odd juxtapositions and sly jokes. That sense of humor alone is a relief, but it's married to music that's restless, encompassing the worldbeat textures of "Peace Be Upon Us" (featuring Ahmed Al Himi on backing vocals), the lopsided shuffle of "Love Is Free," and the sultry '70s Stones swagger of "Gasoline." Crow hasn't been this free or fine since Sheryl Crow, but there is an emotional directness on Detours that makes this a progression, not a retreat, and with any luck, this album isn't a one-time journey down a side road but rather the touchstone for the next act in her career. ---Stephen Thomas Erlewine, AllMusic Review

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