

# Sarah Jaffe

For 28-year-old singer-songwriter **Sarah Jaffe**, ***Don't Disconnect*** is both a mission statement and a call to arms -- an album about getting to know yourself in a hyper-connected world that makes it nearly impossible to do just that. The leadoff track from the Texas-born musician's third LP sets the tone: "Middle of the line/ Middle of the road," Jaffe sings over mid-tempo beats on "**Ride It Out**," "Nowhere to hide on this logical plateau/ Gunna have to ride it out." "Riding it out" -- that is, facing your reality and learning how to cope with it, is a powerful opening credo for an album titled *Don't Disconnect*, which emphasizes the power of staying truly "connected" without unplugging from the world around you.

In the six years since her debut EP ***Even Born Again*** was self-released in 2008, Jaffe's endearingly stark narratives have gone from homespun folk-pop songs in the lineage of **Lucinda Williams** to decidedly cathartic blues-pop ballads that rest at the intersection of indie, folk, and electronic -- without losing any of the thoughtfulness or intimacy. "In a testament to old and new," she once sang on her EP's title track, and that is a designation that stands even as her music continues to evolve.

Part of Jaffe's charm comes from that fact that she writes all of her lyrics herself: after wowing crowds at Austin City Limits in the late 2000's, she earned local recognition through the *Dallas Observer* Music Awards and signed a deal with Kirtland Records in 2010. Her Kirtland debut ***Suburban Nature*** followed exposing the artist to an international audience who found solace in the album's confessional, literary aesthetic without forsaking, as one reviewer put it, "the decidedly punky force behind the quiet façade." *Suburban Nature* was still minimal-- produced by John Congleton, who cut his teeth working with **St. Vincent** and **Wye Oak** -- but this time Jaffe was joined by a band, who rounded out the tenderness in her voice with lush overtures that made it poignant. "If you say go, I'll go," she sang over delicate guitar strums on "**Stay With Me**," before adding in an understated croon, "Please stay with me." The record's hit single, "Clementine" captured a similarly beautiful sentiment about living, freedom, and the wonder of being young: "50 states, 50 lines, 50 crying-all-the-times/ 50 boys, 50 lies, 50 I'm-gunna-change-my-minds".

By the time ***The Body Wins*** arrived in 2012, the pace of Jaffe's music had shifted but the delicacy had not: the record's instrumentation veered more towards electro-pop, but the troubadour storytelling and heartfelt lyricism was every bit as cerebral. "There's always a point/ A point of no return," she sang memorably on "**Mannequin Woman**," which she later performed for her late night television debut on *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*, "Always something to give up/ Always something to learn." Outside of her own music, Jaffe was learning too, beginning a writing partnership with hip-hop producer **S1 (Beyoncé, Kanye West, Jay Z)** for whom she also provided vocals. The duo's first collaboration, "**Bad Guy**" became the first track on **Eminem's MMLP2** LP.

The highly anticipated follow-up to *The Body Wins* continues to showcase Jaffe's range. ***Don't Disconnect***, due out August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2014 on Kirtland, was produced by **Midlake's** McKenzie Smith, whose "amazing partnership," Jaffe enthuses, was "like two friends in the studio" -- a warmth that bleeds through to the record, despite the technological connotations of its title. If *The Body Wins* emphasized the triumph of the corporeal -- in metaphors and direct references to "the body" -- then *Don't Disconnect* is about the humanity and vulnerability that lies within.

But *Don't Disconnect* is also about the spectrum of emotions that come with self-examination: "Ride It Out" is an exuberant anthem and one of Jaffe's most up-tempo songs to date, setting the record's energy of catharsis in motion from the album's opening moments -- and yet the following song, "**Fatalist**" is stark, introspective, and existential. Elsewhere on the album, she waxes philosophical ("Constant questions at my feet/ Is everything a sign for me?" she sings on "**Revelation**") and melancholy ("I'll be leaving now/ I can show myself out" on "**Satire**").

Throughout the record, Jaffe's vocals continually impress: on "**Either Way**" she channels a sultry smokiness while conjuring a mystique whose elegance is underscored by weeping strings and staccato drum builds. On "**Slow Pour**," her voice floats almost ethereally over the music, but on every song, the sound is uniquely her own, and nowhere is this more apparent than on the title track. Even though "**Don't Disconnect**" arrives in the middle of the record, it's earnestness sets the mood with Jaffe brandishing her voice through heavy narratives and gentle melodies: "Do you still feel me?/ Don't disconnect yet..." she croons, deftly crafting a vulnerability that feels both relatable and comforting.

Ultimately, the desire to stay connected in the *right way* -- with yourself, and with the people who matter -- is what drives the album. Jaffe describes *Don't Disconnect* as being about coming to terms with who she is: "It's sort of like my hands are up in the air," she says, "We're constantly comparing ourselves, whether we know it or not, because there's always something out there to compare to. So [*Don't Disconnect*] is a self-diagnosis, but it's light hearted." The record's final track, "**Leaving The Planet**," makes it obvious what she means. The single is fittingly uplifting, with lyrics that feel dreamy and appropriately universal -- but just when the mood seems to settle, the music rumbles and crashes, knotty guitar lines kick in, and drums clash against Jaffe's carefully-sussed lyrics. What's important, however, is not the chaos, but how Jaffe reacts to it: over the record's final notes, she sings, "Are you leaving the planet?" before echoing, more firmly, "*I'm following you.*" This last line highlights why the album is so important: *Don't Disconnect* is about learning to live with yourself, but it ultimately shows the power of remembering that you don't have to do it alone.



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