

**M**usician Rufus Wainwright may sing openly about Greek men who turn him on or how he's waiting for his rebel prince. But in this age of *Will & Grace*, the biggest stumbling block for his second album is, in fact, a casual reference to tobacco. "I want Cigarettes and Chocolate Milk" to be the single," says Wainwright, who's a little sleepy after snatching out of bed for a midday interview at the Gramercy Park Hotel in Manhattan.

He's referring to the leadoff track on *Poses*, due out June 5 on DreamWorks. Drofully amusing, it catalogs the

## The world according to

good things that are bad for you with lyrics like "Everything it seems I like's a little bit stronger, a little bit thicker, a little bit harmful to me."

"It's about grappling with addiction and walking that fine line between having fun and having fatalities," says the 26-year-old Wainwright with a laugh, frustrated that radio might shy away from his best shot at a hit song. "Everybody's just so paranoid about everything."

Wainwright's debut CD was a critically acclaimed work—it made the top 10 of *The Village Voice's* prestigious Pazz and Jop poll—but it didn't exactly set the house on fire commercially. (The biggest boost in sales didn't come from radio play—it came from a Gap

ad in which he crooned "What Are You Doing New Year's Eve?") Since Wainwright talks about wanting to be a rock star, you might worry he'd try adding in rap or electronica to beef up his commercial prospects.

But *Poses* is the logical successor to his first album. It's a swooning, fatally romantic work with a new dash of humor that features 11 new songs and a cover. Highlights include the amusingly ambivalent "California," "Poses" (in which he sings "I'm drunk and wearing flip-flops on Fifth Avenue"), and that cover: a version of "One Man Guy," his dad's clever tune about being alone.

Wainwright's dad is musician Loudon Wainwright III, and his mom is

ing to coddle it. "There are people who have to do the vocal exercises, who can't stay out late and can't smoke and have to get their 10 hours' sleep."

But he certainly isn't one of them. "I'm not saying it's not going to get me at one point," he says. "But my voice seems to be getting stronger and stronger the more I try to destroy it."

So is his career, even though Wainwright can't bring himself to smooth out his eccentricities or cover an oldie to achieve commercial success.

"I don't think he has it in him," says Lerzy Waronker, the head of DreamWorks Records and a record industry veteran who has championed singular artists such as Wainwright and Randy Newman all his career. "I do think he

Kate McGarrigle, half of the acclaimed '70s folk duo Kate and Anna McGarrigle. As Wainwright puts it, that makes him "Scottish royalty," which captures the feuding many have: that he gets a little more attention, a few more perks, but no truly intense scrutiny.

Other members of Scottish royalty include his talented sister Martha and Terily Thompson (son of folk-rock legends Richard and Linda Thompson). Both of them will join Wainwright on tour this summer, the first chance in a while for fans to hear Wainwright's beguiling baritone voice, which sounds better than ever on *Poses*.

"One should be amazed at how resilient the voice is," says Wainwright, who happily admits that he does not

"There's one song in particular in which I tried to write a great piano concerto at the end of it. I don't think it's anywhere near as challenging as Stravinsky or Prokofiev or anywhere in that league.

But it sounds good. You know—Rufusian."

## ROCK AND ROLL

Out singer-songwriter Rufus Wainwright talks about his new album, *Poses*, and why his desire to be a rock star hasn't led him to compromise his music BY MICHAEL GILTZ

# Rufus



has it in him to write a passionate song that will ultimately reach out to a bunch of peopler. That will happen now, or it will happen later."

But clearly it can't be forced. Ask Waronker—whom Wainwright credits with giving him "probably the best situation that exists now for any performer"—what the goals are for *Poses*, and he answers. "Oh, I don't know," as if commercial considerations are almost beside the point. He will aver that Wainwright is already valuable to DreamWorks, giving them the credibility to sign other artists like Neely Plarado.

Since airplay isn't a given, the currently single Wainwright happily dives into a number of side projects to give him visibility. He croons "Moulin Rouge" over the opening scene of the new Baz Luhrmann (of *Romeo + Juliet* fame) musical of the same name; he does a cover of Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" on the soundtrack to *Stork*, the hotly anticipated summer movie; he set to music Shakespeare's 29th sonnet ("When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes...") for a benefit album for the Royal Shakespeare Company; and he's interviewed on the DVD release of the classic documentary *Grevy Gardens* because he's watched the 1975 David and Albert Maysles movie some 20 times and even wrote a song on his new album that was inspired by it.

All that, and he even has a stockpile of ambitious, classically inclined songs that America just isn't ready for yet.

"It's American lieder," explains Wainwright. "Totally Straussian, Schubertian, very Germanic, but still jazzy." These pieces are sometimes 20 minutes long and by far the most musically complex he's written.

"I mean, there's one song in particular I'm thinking of in which I tried to write a great piano concerto at the end of it," he laughs. "I don't think it's anywhere near as challenging as Stravinsky or Prokofiev or anywhere in that league, I don't think—I don't think. But it sounds good. You know—Rufusian." ■

Giltz also writes for the *New York Post* and *Entertainment Weekly*.

Find more on Rufus Wainwright and his new album. Press at [www.480art.com](http://www.480art.com)