

# St. Vincent

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Two years ago, Annie Clark's recorded debut as St. Vincent, **Marry Me**, gave immediate notice that a dizzying new talent had emerged from the flatlands of Texas. Critics from all points of the cultural compass—from Pitchfork to Spin to the New York Times Magazine—were entranced by the album's precocious arrangements and elegant lyrics, and the steadily growing crowds at St. Vincent's live shows were astonished by Clark's gargantuan musical chops and her magnetic stage presence. No small number of St. Vincent fans took the title of **Marry Me** literally, had their hearts duly broken, and wouldn't have had it any other way. The record was heralded as a remarkably successful entrance and Clark capped a year of international touring by winning the Plug Awards' Female Artist of the Year.

**Actor**, St. Vincent's beguiling, sophisticated new record, takes that debut's ambition as its starting point and never looks back. The arrangements are more masterful, the songwriting grander, the performances ever more confident and inspired. Clark developed an idiosyncratic writing process for **Actor**, immersing herself in some of her favorite films—Badlands, Pierrot le Fou, The Wizard of Oz, Stardust Memories, Sleeping Beauty—and beginning each song as a secret film score, then slowly giving it independence as its structure and lyrics came fully into focus. The resulting eleven tracks are as cinematic as pop songs can be, but the movie is a private one, revealing its storyline in hushed, cunning couplets and cascades of scathing guitar.

Here is a record to listen to with your eyes closed. Melodies are transposed and inverted. The fantasy of Disney is juxtaposed with the sweep of Morricone, David Mamet's unsettling dramatic form and the alienation of Philip Roth. Igor Stravinsky scores Roger Corman's horror flicks.

'The Strangers' starts off as a deceptively dulcet elegy for a lost love, then suddenly capsizes under a flood of distortion. 'Actor Out Of Work' is a devastating sonic kiss-off, complete with slyly poisonous lyrics and steamrolling guitars. The strings and woodwinds at the opening of 'Marrow' might be escorting Dorothy to the Emerald City, or straight into the flying monkeys' clutches. The crackerjack band, including supporting turns by McKenzie Smith and Paul Alexander of Midlake, has the crunch of a tank and the grace of a chamber ensemble.

If **Marry Me** served as the world's introduction to Annie Clark, **Actor** may prove to be her coronation. As the terrifyingly beautiful movie inside Clark's head flickers across the screen, we can all feel privileged to be in the seats.