



WALKING OFF STRONG

Caroline Smith uses her own struggle with self-doubt to empower women.

✍ Chance Hoener
📷 Rachel Collins

Caroline Smith walked onto the Vaudeville Mews stage, decked out in gold chains, a ball cap, and sporting enough swagger to make Frank Sinatra jealous. When she sings, everyone in the room gets lost in the soulful, uplifting sound. Her rhythmic harmonies and jazzy growl make it impossible to stand still.

However, the 27-year-old native of Detroit Lakes, Minnesota, hasn't always been a pillar of confidence. She explains her struggle with self-esteem in her latest album, "Half About Being a Woman."

"I think a lot of it has to do with my personal journey to self-acceptance, and that has seemed to resonate with a lot of ladies who listen to it, which was kind of a happy accident," Smith says.

Musically speaking, Smith started at a young age, learning to play guitar from her father and listening to her mother's favorite songwriters, like Carole King. She began playing indie folk with her band, "The Good Night Sleeps," and in 2008, it released its debut album, "Backyard Tent Set." But recently, the sound has changed. The group ditched the band name—and instead has capitalized on Smith's powerful voice while trading rock beats for soulful bass lines.

"The new sound just came from growing up and finding my own voice," Smith says. "So, it doesn't sound like much of a departure to me, which I know sounds ridiculous."

Smith attributes the change in sound to powerful women who helped her find a voice. Nineties R&B artists like TLC and Erykah Badu have not only influenced her music, but empowered her.

"I'm inspired by women who write their own music and women who write for other people," Smith says. "I just like women in the creative arts because we're kind of few and far between."

Now Smith is working to be an inspiration herself. Most recently, she released a duet with Lizzo, a female artist from Minneapolis. The single, "Let 'Em Say," was recorded last fall with a portion of every purchase going to the equality-seeking Women's Foundation of Minnesota—just another way Smith hopes to empower women.

"That, to me, is really cool that women could find some solace in listening to the record."

Smith is back on tour this spring and will perform at music venues across the Midwest. *dm*