

VANJA SKY



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"I decided I wanted to play guitar right then and there"

Sky picked up the guitar just five years ago, inspired by an evening visit to a live music venue near her hometown of Buzet. "It was crazy," she laughs. "There was a special energy in the air. I can't even describe it. I decided I wanted to play guitar right then and there – and when I decide something, I just have to do it." She ordered a cheap guitar on the internet, began taking lessons from the guitar player whose performance had inspired her and eventually quit her job as a pastry chef to dedicate herself to music.

Bad Penny –an album of modern electric blues

Roughly two years later, she left home to join a band in Croatia's capital. Concerts in Serbia, Slovenia, Germany and her native Croatia allowed her to hone her skills as both a singer and guitarist.

Jump ahead to the year 2017. Faster than she could ever have imagined, Sky is now making a record with some of the biggest names in the blues business. Her first stop is Bessie Blues Studios in Stantonville, Tennessee, the home base of Grammy-winning producer Jim Gaines. There, she records the sizzling, Luther Allison-penned roadhouse blues "Low Down and Dirty" together with fellow guitarists Mike Zito and Bernard Allison. A short time later, she reconvenes with Zito and a cast of experienced session players to record another eleven tunes. The result is her debut Bad Penny –an album of modern electric blues with a straightforward, rock'n'roll attitude.

"Vanja is a passionate songwriter who writes from her feelings."

"We named it after the Rory Gallagher song, which I also cover on the album. Rory is one of my favorite players. He has a special place in my heart." Besides the Irish blues-rock legend, Sky cites Stevie Ray Vaughan and Albert King as key guitar influences. At times, her tasteful playing on Bad Penny also recalls that of Dire Straits founder Mark Knopfler. Vocally, there's an edge and aggressiveness that wouldn't feel out of place on a late-70s recording by L.A. rockers The Runaways.

"Vanja is a passionate songwriter who writes from her feelings. But she also enjoys having fun and cutting loose," says Mike Zito, who oversaw the production in Berlin. "She has a very strong voice and her love for blues guitar will be her strong suit."

Besides Zito, Sky is joined on Bad Penny by drummer Matt Johnson and bassist Terry Dry, a potent rhythm combo with credits including Trudy Lynn and The Mighty Orq, as well as fellow Texan Lewis Stephens, a standout keyboarder who has accompanied Freddie King, Delbert McClinton and Gary Clark Jr. "We worked very hard and also had a lot of fun," says Vanja Sky with a smile. "The band did an amazing job and helped me feel comfortable, since this was my first album. Mike helped me arrange the songs, shared a lot of good advice and showed me some great licks on the guitar."

"Low Down and Dirty," her triple-threat performance alongside Zito and Bernard Allison, is not just one of the album's highlights. It also signals what's ahead for Sky in 2018. Starting in January, she'll be featured together with Allison and Zito on the 14th edition of the Ruf Records Blues Caravan. The tour will take her across Europe and North America, allowing her to fulfill the ambition that was born on that night five years ago when her old life stopped and the guitar became the center of her universe. "Music is the most wonderful gift on the planet. It's my aim to bring happiness through music to as many people as possible."

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