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WHEN POPULAR *AMERICAN IDOL* CONTESTANT BROOKE WHITE was eliminated from the show in April 2008, it wasn't the end of her musical career. Since then, the Los Angeles-based singer-songwriter has appeared on half a dozen top talk shows, performed as part of the *American Idols LIVE!* tour, shot a video for VH1, and released an advance single from her upcoming album, *High Hopes and Heart Break*.

Brooke has played piano since age seven and performed since her teens, but she says the *Idol* experience helped her achieve a new level of musicianship: "*American Idol* made me a better musician and a more defined artist. I've really come to know myself better musically, and become more creative."

Oddly enough, White never intended to become a singer, despite her musical background. "I didn't like the sound of my voice," she says. "It never even occurred to me that I could sing." What changed her mind was listening to 1970s singer-songwriters, particularly Carole King.

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"I remember thinking that to be a good singer, you had to have a really high voice with strong vibrato," says Brooke. "But then I'd listen to Carole King and think, 'Wow, she really has her own sound.' And the fact that she played piano, sang, and wrote her own material made me connect with her. I was drawn to her honesty, to the rawness of what the '60s and '70s brought. I think that's the stuff we'll still be listening to for years and years to come."

On *American Idol*, Brooke tapped into this sensibility with compelling performances of songs like "Let It Be" and "You're So Vain." She hopes to communicate a similar kind of timelessness with her new record. "If you have the right songs, and you sing from a place that feels honest, you capture a time and a place that people can relate to," she observes. "I tried on this record to have fewer boundaries—it wasn't overly genre-conscious. As a matter of fact, it's a nearly genre-less record."

White co-wrote much of the new record with producer Dave Cobb, who is best known for his work with Waylon Jennings (and also recently co-wrote and produced a debut album by Michael Johns, Brooke's fellow *Idol* finalist). For Brooke, collaborating with Cobb was an eye-opening experience.

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"In the past, I've written a lot of solo stuff, but this record is entirely co-written," she explains. "At first I was shy about co-writing, because I thought that people wouldn't take me seriously as a writer if I collaborated—that they would think I wasn't really writing the songs. But as I started taking my ideas to writing sessions, I realized that my songs are better for the collaboration. And the songs are totally me: my stories, my life, experiences around me. They're very personal and authentic to who I am."

One of Brooke's main songwriting tools is her Yamaha Motif XS8 keyboard. "In live performance and at home, that's what I play," she says. "I love the Motif. It's the Mercedes of keyboards. It has everything you could want: all the sounds, and a built-in sequencer for putting your ideas down and layering them. One of the reasons I was attracted to the Motif was the variety of very '60s- and '70s-sounding keyboard tones, like the Rhodes and Wurlie sounds. They're so true and organic. And I love the fact that it's got 88 weighted keys, which gives you a response similar to a piano."

White also uses Yamaha's HS80M speakers in her home studio. "I play the Motif through them," she says. "When I first started looking for monitors, I wasn't quite sure what the best option was, but then I found out that these were kind of like the heir to the NS10s. And when I heard them, I said, 'That's perfect.' For my setup, they're ideal. They have a nice, clean, *loud* sound, which is my favorite!"

As she prepares for her album's release, Brooke is focusing on the things that really matter about her music. "It's very easy to rush off into the future and think, 'What if this happens or doesn't happen,'" she says. "But I'm really trying to stay in the moment and enjoy the ride. The business surrounding the music is pretty overwhelming, all the legalities and paperwork and decisions. But when you've put in the hours and you're up on stage, or in the studio singing that song that just feels so right, there's nothing like it. That's when you feel like you're not even working at all."