

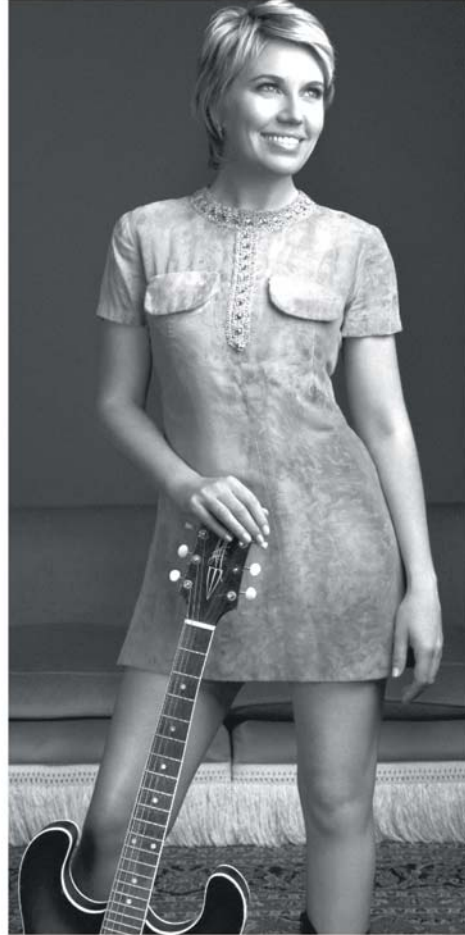
SINGER/SONGWRITER **MELINDA SCHNEIDER** IS VERY MUCH HER OWN PERSON THESE DAYS AND THAT'S ALL OVER HER LATEST ALBUM, *BE YOURSELF*, AS **MICHAEL SMITH** DISCOVERS.

STILL HERE

"It's really nice to be able to just be completely free and honest – all part of being your own label [Be Music]," Schneider admits, having "survived" the release, two years ago, of *Stronger*, her "divorce" album, remarkably well. "I do find it pretty important to have that balance too, as much as I'd love to be Leonard Cohen and record a really dark record. But I am really positive and quite a joyful person a lot of the time and I also get really depressed and down as well, as any songwriter does."

Having fulfilled her previous contractual obligations, Schneider pretty much spent all of last year writing songs, travelling to Nashville four times spending about five months there, as well as popping down to Melbourne to record the duet *Still Here* with Paul Kelly. "I wrote *Still Here* in Nashville with Jay Knowles, one of my favourite co-writers. When we finished it I could just hear Paul's voice and I know he doesn't usually record songs he hasn't written, but earlier this year I was snorkelling at Coogee and got up out of the water and there was Paul sitting on a rock. So I went up to him, told him I had this song I'd love him to do as a duet and could I email it to him and he said sure, listened to it and liked it and that was a big thrill for me. So I recorded it down at his house, set up the mics facing each other and since we don't know each other that well, there's a charming shyness about the song, giggling a little like two teenagers or something on a first date."

The rest of *Be Yourself* was recorded in Nashville with Schneider's main songwriting partner Gordon Kennedy, who co-produced it with her as well as playing guitar and adding his own to her backing vocals, all with additional help from engineer/producer Michael Clute, who's worked with the likes of Faith Hill and Brooks & Dunn among others. The result is something more stripped back than her previous work. "Live, there's a temptation to use electric guitars and I said to the guys I want to



keep it exactly like the record and if it means two acoustic guitars, drums and bass and Hammond, then that's what we do. We'll just get my front of house guy to 'turn up the acoustics!' Much as I love my previous records, I think my voice really benefits from not having an eight-piece band around it, to really be able to hear the lyrics and I think the songs on this album – and country songs in general – are a journey of crisis and catharsis, but there's always a lesson when the music stops."

WHO Melinda Schneider

WHAT *Be Yourself* (Be Music/Destra)

WHEN & Thursday 3 July,

WHERE City Tattersalls Club, Sydney