



Roots: Cutrufello and her Telecaster

Hail Mary

BY TED GIDEONSE

MARY CUTRUFELLO IS A CONTRADICTION. A mixed-race, Yale-educated native of Connecticut, she moved to Texas a few years back and started to make a name playing country and rockabilly. A cult of fans began to flock to her shows where, dreadlocks flying, she played her amazing brand of country-meets-classic-rock guitar. In an era of moody alternative posturing, Cutrufello was an authentic throwback to the jeans-and-flannel rockers from the late '70s.

Now Cutrufello's cult is likely to grow. After a rousing performance at a Nashville showcase for up-and-coming artists last year, she landed a six-album deal with a major label. This week her debut, "When the Night Is Through," hits stores. Cutrufello has a deep, throaty voice with a touch of country twang, and she sings of lost love and sorrow in small towns. The tracks are driven by her powerful Mellen-camp-meets-Raitt guitar; "Sunny Day" and "Sad Sad World" make you want to jump up and dance. Cutrufello prides herself on driving to gigs in her green van—"All that jet-set rock-and-roll thing is not my bag," she says—but after this record, she may have to settle for a limo.

Cutrufello, 29, is the adopted daughter of two schoolteachers. When she was little, she was fascinated by a guitar that had been left in their house. "Nobody was allowed to touch it, as if its owner was going to come back and find little-kid fingerprints on it," she recalls. Her parents finally sent her to lessons, but Cutrufello says she really learned guitar by playing along to Tom Petty and Bruce Springsteen songs. "Rock-and-roll music is my home," she says, and with this album, she brings down the house. ■