

# She Tries, She Scores

UNIQUE, SMOKY-TONED POP-SOUL SINGER MACY GRAY, AT THE CHUMASH CASINO ON A DOUBLE BILL WITH SEAL, PROMOTES COOL NEW COVERS ALBUM

By *Josef Woodard*,  
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## Macy Gray, with Seal

**When:** 8 p.m., Thursday  
**Where:** Chumash Casino,  
3400 E. Highway 246, in Santa Ynez  
**Cost:** \$55 to \$95  
**Tickets:** 800-585-3737,  
[www.chumashcasino.com](http://www.chumashcasino.com)

**M**acy Gray, she of the unique, smoky-toned and soulful purr of a voice, is hardly one for the “where are they now?” files of music stars who slipped into obscurity. But she is one of those artists, not unlike Lauryn Hill, who made a major splash and since has eased into humbler trains of cultural and public activity.

We’re talking, of course, about her still hypnotic signature hit “I Try,” from her platinum-plus-selling debut album “On How Life Is,” a song that seized the radio airwaves in 1999 and earned a 2001 Grammy for “Best Female Pop Vocal Performance.” The song, with its odd but stubbornly infectious chorus (“I try to say goodbye but I choke/I try to say goodbye but I stumble”), was also nominated for “Song of the Year” and “Record of the Year.” Not bad for a singer, born in Ohio in 1967, who took a semi-accidental side door route into the spotlight, after writing songs and working on demos, but disliking her own voice.

Although Ms. Gray’s career never attained the lofty altitude of her debut splash, she has continued to be a distinctive voice on the scene. For her current trick, Ms. Gray has released a sultry, cool and sometimes conceptual album of cover material, coyly named “Covered,” produced by noted idea man Hal Willner (429 Records). Among the intriguing covers in question are the Eurhythmics’ “Here Comes that Rain Again,” Radiohead’s “Creep” (which has been in her live set for awhile), Metallica’s “Nothing Else Matters” and Arcade Fire’s “Wake Up,” with some quirky spoken word tracks reflecting this artist’s healthy sense of self-effacing humor and poised attitude toward show biz.

Ms. Gray, who most recently appeared in the 805 for a Dream Foundation charity event last year, took a bit of time out of her schedule to discuss her current, many-tiered state of affairs, on the eve of her Chumash Casino double-header next Thursday, with the artist known as Seal.

**News-Press:** You’re doing the show at the Chumash Casino with Seal. That must be a trip of a double-header. Is live performance something you’ve always enjoyed, in one way or another?

**Macy Gray:** Yes, I love performing in front of people whether it’s 2, or 2000. It’s like a high for me.

**NP:** I’m loving this new “Covered” album, produced by Hal Willner. Was there a particular spark which inspired you to plunge into this project? Did you always have in mind to one day do a covers album?

**MG:** I’ve always wanted to do a cover album. I really liked the way Nina Simone took other peoples’ songs and made them her own. That’s what I wanted to do.

**NP:** You really bring something fresh to these songs. Was there a kind of overview of what material you wanted include, and did you see it as



Stella Velasco photo

a kind of definition of different aspects of your own musical identity?

**MG:** The songs weren’t really something we planned out specifically. Most of them are songs we grew up listening to and always liked, and wanted to turn into our own, like “Here Comes the Rain Again” and “Smoke 2 Joints” (by The Toys). Others, like “Teenagers” (by My Chemical Romance) and “Sail” (by AWOL Nation), were new and fun, and I wanted to put my own twist on them. But most of the songs came out kinda’ dark.

**NP:** Speaking of dark, that’s a great version you do of Radiohead’s “Creep,” for one . . .

**MG:** Thank you.

**NP:** On the album, woven into the musical tracks are some funny transitional bits, such as the last track where you play the role of a prima donna. I’d say you have a healthy sense of humor about yourself, and about the fickle game of the music industry. Do you think you have a healthy attitude about your art and your place in the music scene?

**MG:** Absolutely. It’s important to not take yourself too seriously, especially in an industry

where everybody has an opinion, like the music industry. After all, we’re making music, not operating on people.

**NP:** Along with your musical life in motion, you have also been building up a body of work as an actress over the years. Does the actress in you interact with the singer, in terms of getting into a role when you’re making music, or are these separate niches of your personality?

**MG:** Acting is a lot like music. You have to get into a particular frame of mind and tell a story.

**NP:** I must say “I Try” is still a haunting and refreshingly different earworm of a song after all these years. Does your opinion of the song change with the years, as the song people associate you with most strongly?

**MG:** It still amazes me that everyone knows that song. When I wrote it, I never thought years later people would be singing it to me.

**NP:** What’s next in the Macy Gray saga? Do you have projects in mind to pursue?

**MG:** Yes, I have a few more films and albums coming up, and a couple other projects I’m working on that are still in their preliminary stages, so stay tuned.