



MARTHA DOES PIAF

Martha Wainwright's early introduction to the sounds of Edith Piaf was a blessing, writes **Sally Browne**

IT'S an irresistible image. Martha Wainwright and her famous brother Rufus belting out Edith Piaf tunes when they were small.

But that's what the Canadian siblings did when they were growing up in their musical household in Montreal.

"We had our favourites," Wainwright says. "The favourite one I had, and I think was his too, was *Milord*. "We were wild about Piaf. I forget that, because we did grow up in Montreal and in a musical family that had a lot of different types of records. I just assumed that she was that popular for everybody my age and of course that isn't at all the case."

But Wainwright says she remembers the soaring voice and reckless

abandon that Piaf put into every performance.

"That seemed to be very exciting to me when I was a kid. It sort of makes you stand up and shake."

So when she was approached by eminent producer Hal Willner to record some songs by the famed French songbird, Wainwright wasn't exactly unfamiliar with her tunes.

Even so, the 33-year-old, who has released two solo CDs, *Martha Wainwright* and *I Know You're Married But I've Got Feelings Too*, decided to wait before going ahead with the project.

She wanted to work on her own material and, after *La Vie en Rose*, the popular film about Piaf, had come out, didn't want to appear to be jumping on the Piaf bandwagon.

But finally the timing seemed right and Willner – who has records by Leonard Cohen, Marianne Faithfull and Lou Reed to his name – and Wainwright got together an ensemble of string and brass musicians (not to mention the obligatory accordion player) and recorded a couple of shows at small venues in New York.

It was a nerve-racking experience for Wainwright, but the team was so happy with the production – and the intimate, unpolished feel created by the live recording – they decided to release it as is.

And voilà! *Sans Fusils, Ni Souliers, A Paris*, Martha Wainwright's take on Edith Piaf was released.

On the CD, Wainwright covers some of Piaf's more obscure tracks. She didn't want to go head to head with the Little Sparrow on some of her most famous recordings.

Willner originally sent her almost 300 songs on an iPod to listen to.

"I didn't want to get into a caricature of Piaf and I didn't want to

deal with too much of the comparison between my recordings and some of her most famous recordings because she would win that battle," she laughs.

But the singer, whose parents are folk singer Kate McGarrigle and the inimitable Loudon Wainwright III, had the musical pedigree to pull it off, and, growing up in Montreal, is *pas mal* (not bad) at the old French.

"I realised having the focus of doing one artist's songs really made a lot of sense and even though I'm not trying to sound like Edith Piaf and I certainly don't look anything like Edith Piaf, interestingly enough she very much comes out in the songs and I think that's because a lot of the songs were written for her specifically.

"She would tell journalists or poets, men who were often involved with her – whether in a sexual way or a mental way – because she was a very powerful person, she would get these people to write songs for her and I think that they really encapsulated her in the songs."

French connection: Though it terrified her, Martha Wainwright had the pedigree to pull off Edith Piaf's songs

Wainwright's favourite song on the record is *Soudain Une Vallée* (*Suddenly There's a Valley*), which was originally written in English. "When I first heard it I heard it in French and the melody and the air of it was very unFrench. It was very American sounding. Of course I was relieved to sing something that wasn't so word-trippingly 'Frenchy Frenchy', so I really got into it.

"Since having done the record I learnt it was originally an American song, and the lyrics are terrible in English. It's much better in French!"

Wainwright, a frequent visitor to Australia, plans to tour the record next year, although no dates have yet been announced.

Sans Fusils, Ni Souliers, A Paris, Martha Wainwright's Piaf Record is out now.

Carr-ismatic Idol winner aims to stay grounded

MANY 15-year-olds would have trouble describing love. But at that age, last year's *Australian Idol* winner Wes Carr defined it as an animal.

A dozen years after the pop-rock singer wrote *Love is an Animal*, the single became the fourth cut from his debut album *The Way The World Looks*.

Unlike the star-studded cast for the film clip for album single *Fearless*, the *Love is an Animal* clip was stripped back and kept simple.

Wes Carr is up for his first ARIA, writes **Christie Martin**

The Adelaide-born Carr appeared in the video with just his band, preferring to highlight the song more than the production.

An earlier single, *You*, has been nominated for an ARIA Award.

"Even though I didn't write *You*, I really thought the UK songwriters and producers, T. Jay and Adam Argyle, nailed it," Carr, 27, says.

"The music and lyrics captured where I was at the time and it also inspired a few ideas in regards to which direction I should take."

Carr is happy with his album, which includes three of his own songs and seven co-written singles.

"I didn't want to look back in 20 years and cringe but, yeah, I don't

think I'll be cringing," he says. It has been a year since Carr won *Australian Idol*.

He entered the competition knowing his days of being "this dude no one knows about" could not last forever. And despite establishing himself as a professional artist, he wants to stay grounded.

Staying focused and being honest, he says, is what will lead to success, especially with this year's *Idol* contestants.

"If you're a bit scared of the limelight or the judges, you shouldn't do it," he says.

As a contestant he found it hard to get to know the judges, but he has since developed a good relationship with Marcia Hines and Ian Dickson.

Wes Carr's album *The Way the World Looks* is out now. Single *You* has been nominated for an ARIA for Highest Selling Australian Single. See the ARIA Awards on Thursday from 8.30pm on Channel 9.