

From [www.thefempire.com](http://www.thefempire.com)

Published November 2006 in the Self-Confidence issue

By Saleema Fazal

---

*In the wind I crunch I want to die  
They can give me pills  
Or let me drink my fill  
The heart wants to explode far away  
Where nobody knows*

*from Cat Power's "Hate" from the album The Greatest*

To sing such honest and exposing lyrics to hundreds of audience members requires a serious skill. The thought of doing this makes me cringe and evokes my "run and hide" instinct, as being so openly vulnerable is my worst nightmare. Musicians, especially singer/songwriters, garner my utmost respect for their ability to express themselves so candidly to the masses; this a true feat of self-confidence.

Cat Power, whose real name is Chan Marshall (pronounced "Shawn"), is an interesting artist to analyze from the perspective of self-confidence. Cat Power has carved out a niche for herself with her gut-wrenching, emotionally poignant and pensive lyrics that are belted out in a Southern-accented, folk/ blues manner. She's been making music since she dropped out of high school in 1995, but still struggles with live performances. Before the release of *The Greatest* in January 2006, Chan was notorious for stopping shows mid-set because of personal freak-outs. Several years ago she actually played a show with her back to the audience due to her paralyzing stage fright. Since January 2006, her shows have lost this volatility and she has played all shows from start to finish without any meltdowns. So, let's do the math – it's been about 9 years since she's been a musician and only recently has she been able to cope with her stage fright. Pretty remarkable. Her lyrics are so raw and exposing that it doesn't surprise me that it took her so long to get to a point of feeling comfortable with sharing these so intimately with her audiences. I think one of the most compelling things about Cat Power's music is that it feels so genuine, and that she's not an artist that hides behind a glossy exterior of self-confidence. You can tell that she's human and emotional, which makes her ability to share her lyrics that much more special.

*The Greatest* is one of my favorite albums of 2006. The album is lovely and organic and emotional. Chan recorded the album in Memphis and is accompanied by an all-star cast of '70s soul musicians. They help to give the album a robust feel without overshadowing the intimate beauty of Marshall's voice. The album is perfectly produced with all of the nuances of her voice and breathiness coming through. *The Greatest* will take you on a "country-soul" journey and you will think that Cat Power is three times her age and has been making music all her life. The piano and string accompaniments are also spectacular.

Cat Power will be at the Bill Graham Civic Auditorium on December 30 playing with Gnarls Barkley and The Flaming Lips. (I've heard that she's been playing a slowed-down version of Gnarls Barkley's "Crazy" that will knock your socks off!). I, unfortunately, will be out of the country and cannot attend the show, but I encourage you to check out the stellar line-up. And, of course, you should own *The Greatest* if you don't already.