

REVIEWS

NEKO CASE

The Worse Things Get, the Harder I Fight ...

[Anti-]

If you're one of Neko Case's 80,000 Twitter followers, you may think you know who she is: a brutally honest, self-effacing animal lover with a keen perspective and low tolerance for BS. She calls 'em like she sees 'em, and while she's similarly never held back in her music, her songs are very different beasts. She's a true original—Tom Waits meets Patsy Cline—and her best tunes are funny, terrifying and tragic. If she writes from experience, she avoids autobiography by playing characters and swooping down, owl-like, on other people's lives.



Case's sixth album arrives with one of those long Fiona Apple-esque titles that foreshadows serious soul-searching, and sure enough, *The Worse Things Get, the Harder I Fight, the Harder I Fight, the More I Love You* finds the singer opening up—mostly about how she'll never really let us in. "There's always someone to say it's easy for me," she sings on "Night Still Comes," which features one of her trademark shiver-inducing *Twin Peaks* guitar lines. On "I'm From Nowhere," one of several songs about life on the road, she brushes off those who say she's lucky, since she's "been driving for 21 days." "If you only knew what my candied fists



Dan Halman/Invision/AP

Neko Case

can do," Case warns, for once underestimating how well we know her. Elsewhere on this, her finest album since 2006's *Fox Confessor Brings the Flood*, she wonders if she might have it easier as a man—or as anyone other than herself. Maybe, but at least she's got music. On closer "Ragtime," she stares down a blizzard as a piano plays "Summertime." How wonderful, that gap between art and reality. —Kenneth Partridge

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