

Laura Branigan, 25, has good reason to sing. The earthy rocker's first single, *Gloria*, has climbed to 67 on *Billboard's* Hot 100. Her debut album, *Branigan*, is also expected to make the charts. A onetime Broadway hopeful, Laura tried out for 50 roles (and learned to "hate cattle calls") before poet-singer Leonard Cohen hired her to sing backup for his 1977 European summer tour. When she returned, Laura hit the nightclub circuit and met Atlantic Records founder Ahmet Ertegun, the man who helped boost the careers of Ray Charles, Bette Midler and the Rolling Stones. "Branigan is a born vocalist of tremendous power and versatility," says

Ertegun. The daughter of an upstate New York stockbroker and a businesswoman, Laura remembers her mother coaxing her to sing as a toddler. She got her first taste of applause at Byram Hills High, starring in a school production of *The Threepenny Opera*. In 1975 she went to New York City's American Academy of Dramatic Arts and from there, she says, "I hit the streets." Married just two years to corporate lawyer Lawrence Kruteck, 39, the singer is not at all concerned about the 14-year difference in their ages. "To me," shrugs Branigan, who shares a New York penthouse with her husband, "men don't get good until they hit 40." □

