

What Goes On?

Natalie Germann: And Lovely With It

By David Morrison

“Maybe it’s my personality—I don’t know—but I find it really easy to connect with people here,” declared Natalie Germann (hard G), reflecting on how lucky she feels to have found her Nanaimo feet since moving to the city in 2005. But in all honesty, she’s such a sweetheart that she’ll surely never

have problems finding kindred spirits wherever in the world she may venture.

Ever smiling, laid-back and fun, twenty-two year-old Germann is well regarded locally. Everyone I’ve met who knows her gushes when prompted only by the mention of her name, one mutual acquaintance tagging her ‘extremely super-cool.’ How comforting it must be to know you’ve made such

a positive impression on your community, eh? That this young woman is also bestowed with musical talent to match can only further enhance her already considerable appeal.

Germann lived until the age of six in her birthplace of Creston in the Kootenays, also spending some time in Cranbrook and Kelowna and a winter working in Switzerland before landing on Vancouver Island. A natural musician, she relocated here to pursue music in VIU’s famed jazz programme. It was a move softened by the fact that two of her siblings live locally, but one that has presented a whole new world of possibilities she’s been more than eager to explore. In the three years since her arrival, Germann has come a very long way, the release of her superb eponymous debut album earlier this year just a part of the story. I caught up with her a while back to find out more.

“I started playing piano when I was four or five years old,” she told me in recollection of the impact music had on her childhood. “My grandma was a piano teacher, so I’ve played classical piano my entire life. Piano is actually my first instrument; I have a weird relationship with it, though!”

Explaining what she meant by this, it seems that although she can and frequently does sit at a piano to happily freeform for hours, it’s not her instrument of choice when it comes to composition. “I’m probably more competent on the piano, but for some reason the guitar is the instrument that just brings out songs,” she revealed.

That Germann feels she’s a better pianist than guitarist is interesting, as she’s simply brilliant on stringed instruments, period. Her guitar style is deft and physical, reminiscent to these ears of the early work of English folk-rock godhead John



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“To be honest, I hated country music: country and rap. I still don’t like rap! But then I met Ira, started playing mandolin shortly after and fell in love with it. Then I ended up playing in two different bluegrass bands in the last year of school!”

And now Germann finds herself an unexpected bluegrass devotee, playing banjo (as I say: stringed instruments, period) alongside the dazzling Pelletier, upright bassist Dinah D and guitarist Tad Ruszel in their smokin’ hot bluegrass outfit, Skagway. She loves it, especially because such a crucial element of bluegrass is the soaring harmonies that her wonderful voice can significantly contribute to.

The Germann voice is indeed a mightily powerful instrument in itself, rich in tone and loaded with yearning. I could listen to it all day long. Not only does she use it to great effect in her beautiful solo material and with Skagway, but also as backing vocalist with popular reggae/jam band, Jon Bone & The Karuna Movement, one of the headlining acts at this year’s Islands Folk Festival in Duncan.

A lover of vintage acoustic instruments that she seems able to master at will, Germann is well known to local musicians as both the organiser of acoustic jam nights at Lounge One 2 One and manager of the guitar department of Nanaimo’s Music Maxx. Constant interaction with fellow musicians and being immersed daily in the tools of her craft is a situation that delights her. “I do all the ordering and stuff, but I’m also the keyboard person as well,” she enthused. “I love being surrounded by instruments. In fact, on a day off I went to Vancouver and spent all my time in an instrument store there!” (As she’d not encountered it before, I was happy to explain the term Busman’s Holiday!)

It should be obvious if only from this overview that our musical climate benefits greatly from the warm and productive presence of Natalie Germann. That she’s amongst us is pleasing for anyone, like me, with an interest in the Central Vancouver Island folk-rock and bluegrass scenes - especially as at just twenty-two she is such an exciting prospect. Oh, and extremely super-cool, of course...

The CD *Natalie Germann* is available now.

Contact Natalie via www.myspace.com/natliegermann for further information. Skagway can be found at www.myspace.com/bluegrassnanaimo. ■

Martyn. These skills are clearly evident all over the twelve outstanding original songs constituting the aforementioned album, as proficient a release as has been issued by any Canadian female roots artist this year. Stylistically equal parts Joni Mitchell and Gillian Welch, it exudes both sophistication and rustic charm, exhibiting a solid understanding of how to arrange with subtlety within a range of overlapping musical styles including soft jazz, pop, folk, country and bluegrass.

What is most extraordinary about the competence with which she delivers examples of the latter two genres is that she is so very new to them. Before moving to Nanaimo, country-based music did absolutely nothing for Germann—but meeting local mandolin whiz Ira Pelletier (profiled in our Jan/Feb 2008 issue) soon changed all that!

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