

CULTURE

March 30 — April 5, 2007

books — 16



art — 17

calendar
— 19

Sarah Borges' Twang Noir

By Alan Lewis

Special to the *Vermont Guardian*

It seems like Sarah Borges is on her way up. After a few years as an admired Boston roots-minded artist, she has signed to the prestigious Sugar Hill Records label and has a new album, *Diamonds in the Dark*, due out June 12. Is she excited? Borges says, “Yes.” And with career momentum in full swing, Sarah Borges and the Broken Singles are coming to the Middle Earth Music Hall in Bradford.

Borges’ bio claims she has a “rock n’ roll background, deep fried with an admiration for American roots music.” Her site quotes her as saying, “Hank Williams songs and punk rock songs are really the same thing. I didn’t understand that in such a personal way until I started doing this.”

Maybe a little of Williams’ “Lovesick Blues” is in the moniker, Broken Singles. Borges said in an e-mail interview that she and the band considered “singles in the sense of not being attached, and being a little bit lonely.” But mostly they were thinking music. “We did think of all of the meanings of Broken Singles. To us it means records, 45rpm singles.”

After the release of her 2005 album, *Silver City*, Borges said that, as a roots-style songsmith, she was learning. Asked about the present state of her writing, she said, “Songwriting is harder now than it used to be because I’m shorter on alone time. I’m constantly in the van or playing, so I have to seek out bits of time by myself to make up song ideas. I’m still always learning what works and what doesn’t, and having played with the guys in my band for a while now I’m able to anticipate what they might do with a song as I’m writing it. So songwriting is also a little easier now, because I’m able to think of all of the parts while I’m crafting it.”

Borges finds good and the not-so-good in the technology at work in today’s music business. “Technology is a help because people can get a hold of music so much more easily. You can download a song or watch a YouTube video and it helps encouraging people to come out to the shows. It’s also great to have an e-mail list. I remember addressing postcards and spending a fortune on stamps to send out the paper mailing list. This is a big advancement.

“The flip side to all this is that there’s an oversaturation going on. I miss being so excited about a record and playing it for my friends and then they had to go out and buy it. It encouraged a camaraderie among music fans that doesn’t happen now. Our bass player, Binky, put it best by saying that he’d be willing to bet my top 10 favorite



records right now are ones he’s never heard of. And that’s too bad. And it also means that it’s a lot harder to be a successful band because people have so many options, and nothing is as valuable any more because of it.”

What’s an artist to do? “It’s been our experience that in music, just like life, good things rise to the top, so we’re always trying to make/give the best music/performance we can, regardless of the number of folks in the crowd or size of the venue.”

This approach calls to mind Dennis Brennan, a legendary Boston rocker. What lessons may be learned from a veteran like Brennan? “I think Dennis is a lover of music foremost, and you can see that in his songs. It seems like he’s been playing long and hard enough that’s he gone

from journeyman to master, and that’s something I think all of us in music aspire to.”

Asked the story of her signing, Borges said, “We met some of the folks from Sugar Hill last year at the South by Southwest Conference in Austin. They came to our couple of shows, so we started talking to them once we got back to Boston. We’re excited to work with them because we’ll be able to reach a bigger audience, and they have a great track record and a very devoted fan base as a label.”

Borges has an easy-to-like dusky alto to match her twang-noir music, but nothing is for everyone. Asked for a critique of her music that tickled her, she recalled, “[O]ur drummer, Rob, once overheard a showgoer saying he didn’t like my voice. The guy started calling it the ‘Borgitone’ as a means to describe how it annoyed him. That was a good one.”

Not bad. And she could call a side project Sarah and the Borgitones.

Eaglesmith Weekend in Bellows Falls was a great early in-state experience. It was the band’s first Vermont gig and its first show with pedal steel/lead guitarist Mike Castellana.

“Fred fans are notoriously rowdy,” said Borges, “and we definitely has some yellers in the crowd. To get the crowd into our set, I asked them all to scream the first word that came into their head, and I don’t think there was a non-four-letter word in the place. A couple of hundred people screaming obscenities at us. I wonder if Mike was worried about what he’d gotten into.

“Binky is the bass player and my partner in crime on stage,” said Borges of the band’s current makeup. “Rob Dulaney plays drums, and Mike Castellana plays pedal steel and guitar.”

Their upcoming gig at Middle Earth is a return appearance for them.

“We played the Middle Earth last winter,” said Borges. “What stood out most was the friendliness of the crowd and the awesome made-out-of-trees bar. We’re looking forward to coming back.”

The Middle Earth is the spot for fine twang noir and a woody bar. 🌲

Who: Sarah Borges and the Broken Singles
Where: Middle Earth Music Hall
When: Saturday, April 7
For more information:
www.middle-earth-music.com,
www.sarahborges.com