

CULTURE

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Sage advice

Play me a song, Ms. Piano Woman

By Alan Lewis
Special to the *Vermont Guardian*

When Rachael Sage's great *Ballads & Burlesque* CD arrived a few years back, she was already a recording artist with a back catalog of fair size.

So, why hadn't we heard about her before then?

"I'm always excited to play somewhere new, and despite that I'm an East Coaster, Vermont is essentially a completely new area for me," she explained. "I'm not entirely sure why I haven't come through yet, but it boils down to some mundane combination of routing, the fact that neither of my prior booking agents booked me there, and that I didn't know Gregory Douglass yet — and he's the primary reason I'm performing here now, so I'm grateful."

Recollections of past in-state escapades are fun, but Sage's view is fixed on the future. "I'm very excited to build some new memories in Vermont," she declared, "especially since I have only been there to ski as a kid, which I was admittedly pretty lousy at. I'm definitely ready for some redemption."

Sage writes accessible, memorable melodies, and her tunefulness is accented with catchy piano fills and riffs.

"I really don't think of my work as falling into any one musical genre," she notes. "I look at it as a hybrid of every type of music I've ever heard and enjoyed, and perhaps even some that I haven't. I call it 'art-pop' these days."

Sage has hailed the music of a young Elton John, and by six she was a fan of early Billy Joel, plunking out his tunes on piano for friends. "Other than those two, there have just been so many

[influences], particularly female artists." She lists Sarah McLachlan, Kate Bush, Ani DiFranco, Melissa Ferrick, Kristy Kruger, Melody Gardot, Laura Nyro, and Carole King among those whose music has continually inspired her.

"In terms of a single musical influence, I'd have to say Elvis Costello has been the most consistently inspiring for me, purely in terms of the range he's shown throughout his career and how he seems to endlessly challenge himself and push his own boundaries as an artist," she said. "These days I pretty much only listen to independent artists, so it's mainly my friends/peers who are kicking my butt, artistically-speaking, which feels like a huge blessing."

She called her latest CD *The Blistering Sun*, which came out last April as her slow attempt at creating the perfect pop record. She also made herself focus on enjoying the process of putting together the album in an effort not to be "so dark."

"Every album doesn't need to mine your own life for tragedy to ring 'true,'" she said. "I wanted to make an album that reflected my stronger, more hopeful side — which is admittedly not the side from which I usually compose."

"I really wanted to capture more of my sense of humor in the musical arrangements, which I think came across particularly in 'Alright, OK' and 'Lonely Streets,'" she recalled. "16

Featherwoman' pretty much sums up the album's sensibility," she added. "It was a fun record to make, and very different from the new one I'm involved in now, to say the least."

Sage has kept busy, supporting her *Blistering Sun* CD and starting on her next disc. All the while, she operates MPress Re-



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— Rachael Sage

cords, which is hot with a new compilation that simply cannot be beat. *New Arrivals Vol. 2* is a fundraiser for Artists Against Hunger and Poverty. Purchasers can help along a cause while picking up an amazingly consistent set by gifted artists they may not previously have tuned in or even heard of.

Choosing favorites may be too much to ask, but the *Vermont Guardian* inquired about *New Arrivals* newest finds and about artists who took *Vol. 2* in different directions.

"Mieka Pauley is an extraordinary singer, so wise and soulful beyond her years and just a

noting that we've also become friends personally this year, and I admire him as much as a person as an artist. He just has an incredible amount of talent, is a generous performer, and has a sense of adventurousness as a writer and recording artist that I completely appreciate.

"Kristy [Kruger] is someone I've followed for a while, and I saw her last year at South by Southwest and couldn't believe how much she'd grown. She is one of the most committed, focused performers I've ever seen. Her production skills and musicianship are fantastic, and she is going to make a lot of great records. ... I think of all the tracks on *New Arrivals Vol. 2*, her song, 'Dark Stranger,' is probably the most unexpected, sonically, because it has an edgier, more Americana sound that also incorporates alternative/rock and just sounds very modern and classic at the same time."

An old *Ballads & Burlesque* flyer says that Sage also takes a turn at the visual arts, skillfully applying paint to her clothing and hair. And, she said she has some surprises in store for her new Burlington fans.

"I've been working on another forthcoming album actually, so it looks like I'll be doing at least half new material from that project," said Sage. "Plus, of course, it's spring so I'm bound to be wearing something fabulous and colorful — perhaps a new pair of painted jeans for the occasion ... we'll just have to see."

The Firehouse Gallery should be smoking with pop hooks and fabulous freshly-painted looks. 🎨

Event information

Who: Rachael Sage

Where: Firehouse Gallery, Burlington

When: Thursday, 7 p.m.

For more information: www.rachaelssage.com
www.burlingtoncityarts.com/firehousegallery

American life in poetry

By Ted Kooser
U.S. Poet Laureate, 2004-2006



Ted Kooser

One big test of the endurance of any relationship is taking on a joint improvement project. Here Sue Ellen Thompson offers an account of one such trial by fire.

Wallpapering

My parents argued over wallpaper. Would stripes
 make the room look larger? He
 would measure, cut, and paste; she'd swipe
 the flaws out with her brush. Once it was properly
 hung, doubt would set in. Would the floral
 have been a better choice? Then it would grow
 until she was certain: it had to go. Divorce
 terrified me as a child. I didn't know
 what led to it, but I had my suspicions.
 The stripes came down. Up went
 the flowers. Eventually it became my definition
 of marriage: bad choices, arguments
 whose victors time refused to tell,
 but everything done together and done well.

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HEALTH.

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The Health & Fitness Guide will run throughout the winter and spring.

