

MAKING MUSIC IN THE MOUNTAINS: SINGER/SONGWRITER DANA LACROIX

By Wendy Speers



It's just about dinnertime and the sun is starting to sink behind the 20-acre expanse of grassland in Delaware County where singer/songwriter, Dana LaCroix, lives and works.

"This is where I practice and write most of my tunes. I call it The Shack." LaCroix is showing me her "studio," a rustic 12' x 20' cabin on a secluded hillside with a 90-degree view of the Catskill Mountains and a wide blue sky. "It's a little awkward not having electricity up here, but I like the untouched feel of the place. I've got a set of small battery-powered speakers and a portable mini-disc player that I use for recording song ideas. It's really all I need."

With a brand new CD release and plans to tour Europe later in the year, LaCroix is making the most of her time on the hill. "We're getting a great response to the record. I can't wait to start touring it. But I think things are going to be pretty crazy in a few months, so I need to get a good start on some new material while I can."

Entitled *Faith In You*, the CD is a compelling collection of well-crafted folk-pop songs, lushly arranged and delicately col-

ored by LaCroix's pure, yet slightly raspy vocals. The music is more Bonnie Raitt than Joan Baez, yet there is also the slightest suggestion of country somewhere in the mix, and I'm curious about LaCroix's influences.

"Well, my dad sang with a folk trio back in the '60s, so I was pretty much raised on traditionals—John Henry, Satisfied Mind, that type of thing, and the songs of Leadbelly, Seeger and Guthrie. Being Canadian (LaCroix is originally from Toronto), Neil Young was of course an influence, though the country sound is probably inspired more by The Eagles. Having grown up in the '70s and '80s, I have a real love for the pop music of those decades. I think some of that shines through on *Faith In You*."

When I ask LaCroix about her subject matter, she hesitates ever so slightly. "Anyone's fair game, really. A lot of times I'll see a friend going through something challenging or painful, I'll see a song and a story in it, and I'll write it as though it happened to me. Sometimes I'll keep a song in the third person,

but then of course a lot of the songs are personal as well."

My own favorite song on the CD is "Parry Sound," a poignant, stripped-down acoustic track featuring LaCroix's soulful voice, sparsely accompanied by two guitars. "Parry Sound is a little town up in Ontario where I spent a lot of time in the summer as kid. It's a song about a love affair that's coming to an end, but the sense of loss and melancholy is as much about being homesick for a place as it is about the person. I seem to miss home more as I get older."

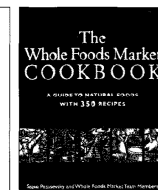
LaCroix began performing at local blues jams while still in high school. She spent a few years playing the Toronto club circuit, but soon felt the itch to travel and set off with a one-way ticket to Europe. Her travels eventually brought her to the States where she spent a number of years in New York City, working as a back-up singer and keyboard player. With the release of her independent debut CD, *Pride*, LaCroix began to focus on writing and touring with her live band.

"*Pride* was a good launching pad. It sold pretty well for an independent and a couple of the tracks were used in a John Turturro film, which was great.

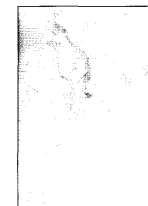
Performing Songwriter magazine liked it too, so that was a real confidence booster. I think this new CD is even better—much better, in fact—so I'm excited to see what will happen with it."

As we walk down the hill towards her small cape-cod style frame house nestled snugly in a hollow on the lower part of the field, I ask whether she ever thinks about returning to Canada for good. "No, Delaware County is my home now, for sure. I love it here. I love living in the mountains, sitting up on the hill playing my guitar. I love being part of a small town community. I never had that growing up in Toronto. Besides, after living in Canada, the winters here are a piece of cake."

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