

More In Depth With...

Kellie Parr

Those familiar with the live music scene in the Golden Isles are most certainly acquainted with Kellie Parr, one of the most popular singer-songwriters in our area. Parr recently released her first solo CD and sat down with me to chat about it. Disclaimer: I've known Parr almost 20 years, and consider myself a friend and a fan of both the person and her music.

In the tradition of troubadours before her, Parr not only sings about love and loss, but speaks out musically on issues that are important to her, particularly the environment and social justice. It seems she was destined to do exactly what she's doing.

"I've always wanted to be a singer-songwriter," she said. "I wrote my first song when I was about eight, but life got in the way."

The desire to write and perform has always been present, she said, comparing it to a dream that she knew would come true eventually, but she harbors no illusions of "making it big."

"I'll never be – and I don't really want to be – a superstar like Sheryl Crow ... but dreams have a way of adapting to the reality of your life," Parr explained, adding that the dreams of today may look different than the "twenty-something" version of yourself may have envisioned, but they exist, nevertheless. "If you want your dreams to come true, you have to make it happen – pour all your love, intensity and passion into it and it'll happen; or you will at least have fun trying."

For the past several years, Parr has wanted to record an album, and the opportunity finally arose when a college friend who owned an independent label in Tampa offered her a recording contract.

"I got excited and started writing," she said. "Then his company went under, but he got the fire going anyway."

Undeterred, Parr decided to record the album anyhow, and poured some of her savings into the project, which includes seven original songs out of the 10 tracks on the CD.

The covers – songs originally recorded by others – include "Groupie (Superstar)" previously recorded by both Roberta Flack and The Carpenters, Blondie's hit, "Call Me," and "Everybody Knows," written by Leonard Cohen and Sharon Robinson



Photos by Bob Swinehart

What she now realizes is that giving herself space to write actually encourages the writing process.

"Three months before I went into the studio, I started making myself sit down and write, at least three days a week, an hour or two at a time," she said. "It worked ... I wrote three songs in less than three months and I've never done that before."

The moral of the story, she said, is that songwriting, like everything else worthwhile, takes work and dedication.

Co-producer Hester assembled the musicians who appear on the album, including Crawford Perkins, Lee O'Neal, Chris Robinson and the mysterious and elusive Jimi Peccash, who is a hybrid of sorts.

"I decided to use Greg's band," Parr said. "I've known all of them for more than 15 years; they're my friends, and I really consider them family."

Part of the proceeds from the sales of Parr's album, which can be found locally at stores including Beachview Books, or ordered online at kellioparr.com, go to the Surfrider Foundation, a grassroots organization that appealed to her because of their work to save the oceans.

"The environment has always been a huge thing for me," said Parr. "Surfrider is a grassroots organization that appealed to me."

When she began the project, she knew she would be donating a portion of the proceeds to a cause important to her. The oceans, she said, are our most important environmental challenge.

"It's what I'm most passionate about," she said. "I love the water."

She's equally passionate about her music, which, she says, gives her the opportunity to tell her story, the basis of which is love.

Other than anything having to do with her son, whom Parr refers to as "my most important part," there is nothing that she would rather do than play music in front of a live audience.

"To me, it's not about writing the perfect pop song or the perfect hook," she said. "It's about telling your story and connecting with people."

—Mary Starr

and recorded by artists such as Concrete Blonde and Don Henley.

"I picked some artists whose songs resonated with me," she said. "Greg Hester, who co-produced the disc, suggested 'Groupie (Superstar)' and he does a version of 'Call Me' that I just love."

In the end, Parr says, she simply enjoyed singing and playing them.

"All the songs I play have to be meaningful to me," she added. "It has to be something I can relate to."

The perfect example of that is one of Parr's original songs, "Be Strong," which tells the story of how she encouraged her son to fight for his life.

"My son, Fisher, is seven," she said. "He was premature and only weighed one pound, 12 ounces."

Fisher spent the first three months of his life in the hospital and while sitting at his bedside, Parr began a journal.

"While he was there, I wrote him letters telling him what was going to happen (medically) that day," she said. "The recurring theme was 'be strong.'"

Parr also speaks out on both local and global issues on the CD. On "LCP

and Mercury," a song that she wrote long ago and refers to as a "tongue-in-cheek" protest song, the lyrics include the statement, "When I see something is wrong, I have to yell about it; seems like it would do some good but somehow I doubt it."

"I was green when green wasn't cool," Parr laughed.

"That song is about me yelling at these companies that are polluting (and) killing us with things we can't see."

It is in Parr's nature to "rail against the apathy" of people not caring until the problem is manifested in their own backyards. Conversely, "My Bleeding Heart," another track on the CD, is about Parr trying to calm herself down and refrain from trying to "save the

world."

The songwriting process varies from artist to artist, and Parr says that sometimes she has to shut herself in her room and write, and other times ideas just come randomly.

"When I was younger, I thought you had to wait around until you felt inspired or had some amazing idea pop into your head," she said. "Well, you can wait years for that, and I did."

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