

Tracy Beck
is a new young talent from Elkhorn, Wisconsin who was motivated in such a way and combined her ideas with guitar and other instrumentation. With a never-ending willingness to try new musical ideas, Tracy draws from her heart and creates a sound that soothes and stories that reveal.

Midwest Folk) What is your musical background?

Tracy Beck) You know those recorders that they'd hand out in grade school? After we were introduced to them and could learn to play them, we could choose whatever instrument we wanted to play. I chose the sax. That would have been when I was in the fourth grade. I loved the saxophone for the way it sounded. It had a lot of emotion and I thought it was a very sexy instrument to play I was in the school band up until my freshman year of high school. I developed other interests such as sports, poetry, books, and writing. I wanted to be a novelist or a world-class runner. I ran a lot! I spent a lot of time writing poetry and short story fiction. I majored in journalism at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee with a self-designed minor that emphasized creative writing. Although I had studied writing for five years, my heart was not in journalism so I left. I left the Midwest and moved out to California.

MF) What -were your intentions in moving to California?

TB) To be with my better half at the time. I really didn't have any direction out there. I was a copywriter for an advertising agency. As it turned out neither the advertising industry nor Southern California was for me. I had stopped in Park City, Utah on my way out to California and I fell in love with its beauty. So we picked up and moved there. I became a ski bum. I skied all day and worked at night in the lodges. At the same time I got involved with a group of friends that wrote songs and played guitars. We'd

go up to the top of this mountain called, "Guardsman's Pass", and just play music. One person would bring their guitar; another person would bring bongos, and sometimes I would bring my sax. I had a friend named Sandy who had a beautiful voice. She wrote the most beautiful country-songs on her guitar. A couple of bands that would come into town to play would let her sing a couple of songs with them. She sounded just like Mary Chapin Carpenter. I never heard what happened to her. But I know that in her heart she wanted to be a singer/songwriter. I thought it would be neat to do what she did so I started writing melodies in my head with words I had written and sang them a capella. I would write the song structure down and practice with it in my head. I would sing walking through the woods while I was hiking or camping. So when I picked up the guitar, the melodies were already there. When my relationship ended I was drawn to the northwest coast. I had lived in Oregon for a couple of years, hooked up with the wrong person, got myself into some financial trouble, and was forced to come back to the Midwest to get my feet back on the ground. That's when everything started to happen. I needed to fill a void in my life and that void was filled with the guitar.

MF) Is that when you decided to try a career as a singer/songwriter?

TB) Not quite yet. I decided to get serious with the guitar. I worked with a couple of people in Milwaukee. Jesse Romero was one of them. He wasn't my first guitar instructor I had, but with him I found that I was able to dive in deep. We had a great chemistry. I started writing songs using my guitar. When Jesse heard them, I guess he was impressed. He turned me onto Darnell Ellis with the idea in mind that he could manage me. I was told that he was a booking agent for country artists. Although I did not consider myself a country artist, I went to the audition with a couple of popular country songs to sing for him. I had no idea what to expect or what he was looking for. After I sang, he asked me if I had any of my own material. So I played him *Ribbons and Bows* and *Beat Up Blue Chevrolet*. That's when he got interested. I told him I wanted to record a CD. Jesse was also a sound engineer who worked at a recording studio called *The Band Center* in Milwaukee. I was never in a recording studio before so it was all new to me. The microphones were so sensitive. I had to work at being perfect with my strumming and finger picking. Darnell and I started working as a team. He eventually ended up producing my CD. He came up with all the different ideas for the sound we wanted to create. He helped me through the whole process. Pretty soon we were working together to promote and sell the CD. That's when Jeffrey Robinson came into the picture. I had seen him up at Summerfest playing lead guitar with Benny and The Jets.

I loved the way he played the Blues. Ironically, he showed up at the Band Center when I was finishing up my CD. I said, "Hey you're that Blues guy I saw

MF) When did the idea of developing this into a career occur?

love, and heartbreak, but for the most part the CD reflects true experiences and searching for one's inner self.

down at Summerfest! Do you give guitar lessons?" He said, " For you I will. " He has been a big influence on my Blues and swing songs I've written.

MF) Do you remember the first guitar you had?

TB) Yes, I regret getting rid of it. It was an old Gibson that I had found in a music store nearby. I was looking at the guitars on the wall while some guy came off the street and started talking to me. He pointed to one hanging on the wall and said, "If I were you, I'd get that one. That's a good one. " So I bought it. After awhile for no good reason I decided to trade it in for another guitar. Later I was told I shouldn't have because it could have been worth some money. When I went back for it, it was gone.

MF) How long did it take for you to feel comfortable performing your songs in front of others?

TB) A couple of years. The more I play the easier it becomes to focus in on the music rather than what's going on around me. I remember playing at the Coffeehouse in Milwaukee for the first time. You could hear a pin drop. That made me nervous. Afterwards I was told I gave one of my best performances.

MF) Do you try to imitate any other artists?

TB) I've been asked who I think I sound like, and I say that I sound like myself! (laughs) A journalist from the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel thought that my CD was reminiscent of John **Denver's Poems, Prayers, and Promises**. I've been told by many listeners that my voice sounds like Stevie Nicks, Joni Mitchell or Janis Joplin. But no, I don't try to imitate anyone.

TB) I think when the CD was completed. I started playing out live 2 or 3 times a week to promote my CD. I was getting good feedback. I was selling CD's. I also realized that I love to play live. It's what I live for.

MF) Tell us about your upcoming CD.

TB) *Into the Sun* consists of fourteen songs. It's a very eclectic CD reflecting an array of emotions. There are a lot of different moods from blues to jazz to folk. I wrote the title song, *Into the Sun* in the winter time. I was wishing I was somewhere warm on a nice sandy beach. It's about the seasons changing, life's changes and one not being ready for them. There is a touch of sadness in the song. Some of the other songs reflect happiness, being in



MF) Are there any songs on *Into the Sun* that reflect experiences you had here in the Midwest?

TB) Oh sure, *Into the Sun* is one of **them. On a Carnival Night** is about all the county fairs that take place here in the Midwest. Most of the songs are about my feelings and experiences in the Midwest because this is where I've been living. I guess if you listen to the songs close enough you'll detect an escapism theme.

MF) I noticed you use three different guitars. Tell us how you use them.

TB) One of them I keep in open tuning. An open D and an open G. I use a Martin D-15 for strumming and a Martin D-28 for mostly finger picking and when I want a full dreadnought sound. I also play the harmonica in some songs to incorporate a different sound. At this time, I don't think I'll be trying to learn any other instruments. I'm content with my studies on the guitar.

MF) Is there going to be a Tracy Beck band?

TB) Yes, Tracy Beck and The Bounty men! Rick Koogley is my bass player. He plays bass on my upcoming CD and Damell Ellis does percussion.

We're picking up work in the Chicagoland area as well as gigs here in Wisconsin. Next summer (2005) or the summer afterwards we'd like to put together an east coast tour. And there is certain amount of interest in playing my music down in the Austin area in the future.

MF) Really when you look back on say the last four years - this has all happened to you so fast. How do you stay focused on your music?

TB) This is what I live for so I find it easy to stay focused. I live and breath music. Darnell asked me the other day, "Did you ever think that you would be playing at Summerfest and selling CD's? All you wanted to do was take a few guitar lessons." (laughs) Experiences are more important to me than money, and my music gives me that experience. It gives me the chance to live life and I think that's important. I don't think it's about money. I don't think it's about the house you own. I don't think it's about the car you drive. I think people get caught up in that materialistic world. When it's all said and done, you can't take things with you. I don't want to be an eighty year old woman sitting in a nursing home saying, "Well, you know, I could have done this, I could have done that." I want no regrets.



Be sure to check out Tracy Beck's website for CD purchase and performance schedule at: www.tracybeck.com



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