



Rachael Sage

Sugar and Spice

In a world where avant-noise rock seems to be the only type of new music getting attention, it's refreshing to hear of a new artist recording purely accessible music. But just because Rachael Sage's music is accessible doesn't mean it's dull.

Sage's piano-driven folk rock is sweetly melodic, tinged with a dash of darkness that turns otherwise ordinary folk into a dish that can't be refused. She explores the murky depths of love and life through lyrics that are sometimes emotional, sometimes cryptic, but always intelligent.

Sage is a self-taught pianist and Stanford drama graduate who began her music career after a year of performing with the Actor's Studio in New York – a city where struggling bands are as common as taxi cabs. Sage managed to secure her reputation as a seriously talented musician, releasing her first album on MPress Records – a label she started herself – in 1996. Since then Sage has won numerous awards for her songwriting, including the 2002 Billboard Songwriting Award.

Her newest record, *Ballads & Burlesque*, lives up to her reputation. Songs such as "One True Thing" explore jazz as well as folk influences, while tracks like "Jane's Dimitri" slow down the pace, highlighting Sage's beautiful piano playing. And as if she needed a reason to validate her place in the world of renowned musicians, she dedicates one of the most melancholy and gorgeous tracks on the album, "Bravest Fear," to the late Elliott Smith.

Sage will play a free show at 2 pm Sunday, Aug. 28 at CD World, followed by an evening set at 6 pm Sunday at Luna. \$7. –Emily Freeman

Bluegrass and Budget Beer

Those who sorely missed the presence of "the girl" at May's Magnolia Electric Co. show (if you missed the show entirely, that's a whole different matter) shouldn't have anything to complain about this month: Jennie Benford recently came through town with the Crooked Jades, and she's back again with Jim and Jennie and the Pinetops. And about time, too.

It's been five years since I used to see Jim and Jennie (then "and the Pine Barons") play a monthly show at a tiny New York restaurant called Old Devil Moon.

The place was packed, month after month, with a colorful array of hipsters, small-town transplants and born-and-raised city kids who cheerily ducked the incredible array of kitschy decorations on the walls, and who hooted and applauded as best they could without setting down their precious cans of budget beer. This was just before *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* and bluegrass was something unexpected and refreshing to a host of semi-jaded New Yorkers – and it was all the better when played by a bunch of twentysomethings who cut their teeth on classic rock and punk. In Jim and Jennie and company's more-than-capable hands, bluegrass was something we could relate to, and we let them know: "It's a Pleasure to Know You," with its kiss-off chorus, was always a singalong, and every time Jennie stretched out that one note in "Little Birdie" for just a little bit longer than anyone in the room could hold their breath, the applause increased proportionately.

Jim and Jennie are now on their third album, *Rivers Roll On By*, a less boisterous affair than their cheeky first release. The old standards are there, lovingly ren-

dered, but they're outnumbered by originals like "Mt. St. Helens," a lament to a lonely life on the side of the titular peak. Jim's goofy tracks, particularly "Quit Barking at Me," are a good time, but Jennie's plaintive ballads are *Rivers'* strength. When the two twine their voices for the a cappella "I Know You're Married But I Love You Still," the effect can cause goosebumps – and chances are it's twice

as good coming from a stage as it is from a speaker. Jim and Jennie can make a good record, but this is music that dances and glows when it's played live. And if they break out some of the traditionals they made their own five years ago, well, I'd tell you I'll be the one in the corner with the stupid grin, but I bet I won't be the only one. Jim

and Jennie and the Pinetops play at 9 pm Thursday, Sept. 1 at Sam Bond's Garage. \$7. – Molly Templeton



Jim and Jennie and the Pinetops

Hogan's Heroes

There's something about a Georgia drawl to make you feel right at home. A Georgian can say "I hate you" and make it sound juicy and sweet. Sun-warmed like those famous peaches, Kelly Hogan's voice is as comfortable as flannel pajamas and just as easy to slip on. Her voice is a smoldering ember, sultry and soulful in minor keys and intimately familiar with loneliness and hope. We had scheduled interviews on two different days last week, neither of which took place. Fortunately I didn't need the interview to write this, having listened to 2001's *Because It Feel Good* so many times. (Yes, it's *Feel* and not *Feels*. Why? Because it feel right.) I would have asked her about her brand new CD *The Love Hall Tryst* featuring John Wesley-Harding, Nora

O'Connor and Brian Lohmann. But maybe it's for the best, because if you lack information, perhaps you'll get to the show and find out more for yourself.

What I do know, having not heard *The Love Hall Tryst*, is that it's mostly a capella, though it does feature a hurdy gurdy. O'Connor is a scrappy Irish-American from Chicago who sang with The Blacks and has backed up lots of folks. She's also a bartender and trained doula (midwife's assistant). Wesley Harding shouldn't need much introduction, but just in case, he's an expatriate British singer-songwriter who was a Ph.D. candidate at Cambridge in 1987 when he threw off the shackles of academia and began life as a musician. Lohmann is the mystery man of the bunch; an actor, unknown to me, who ostensibly was picked to provide a deep bass voice. I can only imagine that the album these disparate people would come up with would be both nightmarish and illuminating.

As great as those folks probably are, I'm here to encourage you to witness Kelly Hogan. Born and raised in Atlanta, the daughter of a policeman and a mother who loved deer hunting and anything pickled, Hogan spent time in popular Atlanta bands The Jody Grind and The Rock*A*Teens. If you're ever out Chicago way, let Hogan pour you a drink at The Hideout, where she moonlights as a bartender.

At Thursday's show, Hogan will perform songs from *The Love Hall Tryst* with Wesley Harding and Lohmann. She will also perform a solo set. Catch her at 8 pm Thursday, Sept. 1 at Cozmic Pizza. \$12.

– Vanessa Salvia



Kelly Hogan



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