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Singer Grant reaches for the moon

Artist duets with other songwriters on new CD
By ANDREA NEMETZ Entertainment Reporter

Jenn Grant sees painting and songwriting as intertwined.

A graduate of NSCAD University, the Halifax singer-songwriter showcases both on her album Orchestra for the Moon.

The effervescent performer wrote all 13 songs on the disc that will be released on Friday at her alma mater, Queen Elizabeth High. And, she created a painting for the cover — one of her trademark abstract landscapes — with bright geometric pine trees and waves set against a swirling orange sky.

"I'm a colourful performer and painter," she acknowledges, by phone from her Halifax home.

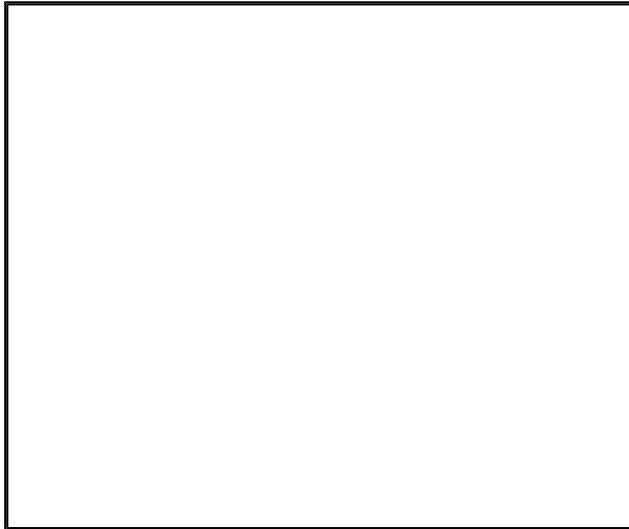
"I feel like they go hand in hand. My paintings are bright and kind of messy. I feel like it's a theme. Mine is not a traditional style of writing. I don't follow structures. I let it come out and see what happens. I try to use images in my lyrics that give people a romantic vision, that are loose and carefree. And I like romantic visuals."

Art actually came first for Grant.

"When I was a child, I'd draw whenever someone gave me a crayon. I went to art school before I became a professional musician. Halfway through art school, I decided to be a singer-songwriter," she says noting she studied drawing, photography and ceramics, in addition to painting, on her way to a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree.

"I thought about performing since I was a child, but I had severe stage fright. My body would shake at the thought. It wasn't until I was in my twenties that I was ready."

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Musician/artist Jenn Grant, shown in Halifax with one of her oil paintings in the background, releases her new CD, Orchestra for the Moon, on Friday at Queen Elizabeth High School. (Ted Pritchard / Staff)

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Emily Murphy

At art school, Grant discovered she was allergic to oil paint which resulted in vocal nodules.

"It was a long process to get rid of them. It was really stressful. Now I don't smoke cigarettes or do anything else bad for me."

The 26-year-old was initially part of an acoustic trio called Nadi with cousins Andrew and Robert MacIsaac of Prince Edward Island. "It helped me get over my nerves," she says.

Their last show together was at Hell's Kitchen in November 2004 as part of a benefit entitled Vixens for Veith House. Grant debuted some of her own songs that night — the night that Andrew MacIsaac told her "this is the last waltz" before he moved away to Ontario.

That line became a song on her EP Jenn Grant and Goodbye Twentieth Century, released in 2005.

And the EP led to a connection with Glenn Meisner at CBC, who produced Orchestra for the Moon, along with the Heavy Blinkers' David Christensen and Jason MacIsaac.

"Originally Glenn thought he'd do another EP, but I wanted to do a full-length album and convinced him during an Atlantic Airwaves interview."

The disc, recorded at CBC's Studio H, features vocals by a Halifax who's who including Rose Cousins, Jill Barber, Matt Mays, Tyler Messick and Daniel Ledwell.

Toronto-based songwriter Ron Sexsmith also appears and her duet with him, In A Brown House, is one of her favourites.

"It's so understated, it sounds just the way I wrote it. It's simple. I love it," she enthuses.

Dreamer — for which she'll film a video in Halifax with director Jeff Wheaton — was written for her then-boyfriend while they lived in a house by Chocolate Lake.

Make It Home Tonight, an achingly beautiful tune, will also be made into a video, likely in Toronto.

The song, which was on her debut EP, was written when she was going through an especially hard time and was trying to get home for the summer.

Grant is very excited about the Friday release party — where she expects to perform surrounded by props from the set of the Titanic, the last musical that will be staged at the venerable high school before it is torn down.

Hosted by CBC's Stan Carew, the 8 p.m. event will feature performances by her good friends Rose Cousins, Tanya Davis, Catherine MacLellan, and David Myles, and likely a few special guests.

"I went to QEH and I dreamed of singing in that auditorium," she says. "I'm really excited."

She plans on doing a show on May 4 in Fredericton (which she affectionately terms her home away from home). Also on the books are all-ages CD release shows at The Guild in Charlottetown and May 12 at The Acorn Room in Souris, P.E.I., a show at which she expects a large contingent of family.

"My family is from Bothwell, outside of Souris," she explains, noting she also expects local ladies to bring biscuits and molasses to the show in the old rink.

"It's an all-ages show," she says. "I like the all-ages format, I want things to be open, for everyone to feel comfortable."

Constantly writing, Grant, who won the Galaxie Rising Star new artist and female artist of the year at the Music Nova Scotia awards in Liverpool last November, says she already has another 10 songs she wants to record, though she thinks she'll wait till fall or Christmas before plunging into a new project.

Tickets for the Halifax show are \$10 in advance or \$12 at the door. Children under 12 get in free. Tickets are available at CD Plus, Lost and Found (cash only) and Pyramid Cafe.

Check Grant's website www.jenngrant.com for new tour dates.

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