

DISCourse: Celebrating the Positive Things in Life

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with Barry "Jack" Jenkins

To those of us who know her, Nicole Edwards is an amazing person. She has a beautiful smile, a happy demeanour, a warm personality, and a fabulous singing voice. High and soft when she speaks, her voice becomes throaty, huge, expressive and honest when she sings. Sage and Wild Roses, her fourth CD, is my favourite so far.

What's also amazing about Edwards is how, despite the effects of scleroderma, a disease that has affected her physically, she's not bitter, but positive. It's inspiring just to know her.

I remember a concert she gave when she could no longer play guitar. As she put it then, "The universe must want me to be a jazz singer." That show was followed shortly by her album of jazz standards, Sparkin'.

With Sage and Wild Roses, Edwards is back in singer-songwriter mode, creating catchy jazz-blues songs.

For this album, she's assembled a Yukon all-star band, The Joy Seekers. With co-writer Dave Haddock on bass and backup vocals, Annie Avery on keyboard, Bob Hamilton on guitar and banjo, Ed White on drums, and Brandon Isaak providing lead guitar on three tracks, these songs are performed by a solid blues band.

Edwards and Haddock have created some incredible songs. *Two Kinds of Pie* is a folksy blues, similar in feel to Taj Mahal's *Fishing Blues* and Edwards' own *Berry Pickin'* from her first album, *On With My Day*.

Haddock's soft harmony and Hamilton's subtle banjo line contrast nicely with Edwards' deeper vocal, bringing out the innuendo that's a must for a great blues song.

Sage and Wild Roses is a love song about sharing simple moments. The lyrics recall the sights and smells of a Yukon summer: "Aspen whisper love is now, trembling/Sage and wild roses." Avery has a light touch on the organ here, bringing this out.

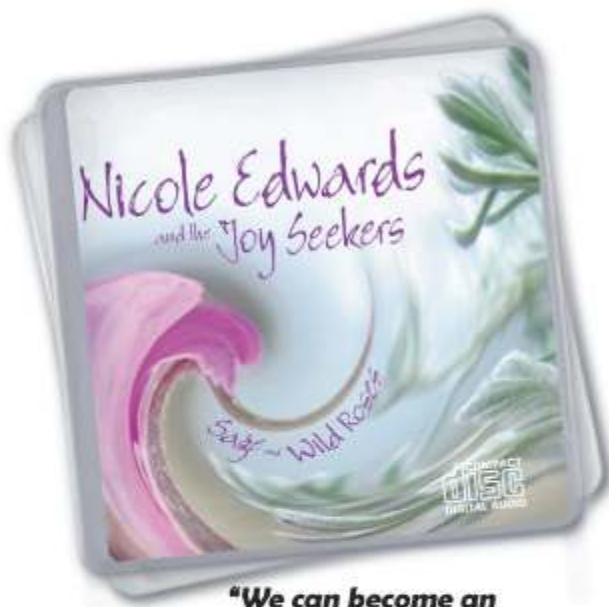
What do you do with your Fire is an excellent duet between Edwards and Haddock that highlights the blending of their voices, Avery's piano, and some great wordplay: "Before I meet your mother/Before the photographer shows/Before the whole story gets carved in stone/Or recorded in indelible prose..../ What do you do with your fire/Do you heat your home or do you burn it down?"

There's a more serious side to the CD. Edwards and Haddock's songs are also meant to inspire, both politically and personally. *Be the Change* builds on Mahatma Gandhi's famous quotation: "Be the change you want to be in the world."

Apathy is Boring, calls out to the listener: "We can become an agent of change/We can represent/I know the couch will be there in the morning/And that apathy is boring." Haddock's bass line provides catchy rhythm for the songs, making you take notice.

On a personal level, many of the songs are about the way Edwards has dealt with her illness. *More than a Diagnosis Blues* shows her determination not to let scleroderma define her. As she sings to her doctors, "I don't want your vision of me/To cloud how I see myself."

Frustration and anger come out in the song, *Grumpy Pants*, but she mocks those feelings until they subside. In



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Longing, she watches a young woman play guitar as she used to, but she sings, “When my cup feels empty, I’ve got to fill it up with love/Fill it to the brim with laughter/So I won’t be swallowed up/By the space.”

These songs and the album as a whole show that she doesn’t see herself as coping with a chronic illness, or suffering from it, but living with it, and celebrating the positive things in her life.

Sage and Wild Roses will be in stores in Whitehorse, December 3. The CD release concert will be at The Old Fire Hall on Friday, February 4.

Outstanding tracks: *Two Kinds of Pie*, *What do you do with your Fire?*

Barry “Jack” Jenkins reviews and discusses Yukon CDs in his DISCourse column. If you are producing one, please contact him at melford12@hotmail.com