

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

Nicole Edwards is still seeking joy

By Kira Steen
News Reporter

Just because we haven't heard from Nicole Edwards in four years doesn't mean the soft-spoken singer hasn't got anything to say.

With the June release of her second album, *Joy Seeker*, Edwards, 34, is back with her passionate, sultry sound and an important message.

Despite being diagnosed with scleroderma, a chronic, degenerative hardening of the connective tissues, Edwards is still living life through her music, though she was forced to step down as executive director of Bringing Youth Toward Equality.

"There's been a lot of loss, which I'm mourning, but I've found there's another side to my loss," said Edwards.

"It's made me realize just how blessed I am with love and support, so much so that we've managed to turn the unachievable into something tangible."

Since her last foray into the music scene, Edwards has been battling her illness in relative silence, but is now using her powerful voice to raise awareness about the debilitating disease.

While scleroderma is a disorder of the connective tissues, it is not limited to the skin.

Many internal body parts, including blood vessels, digestive system, lungs and kidneys can also be affected.

There is no known cure.

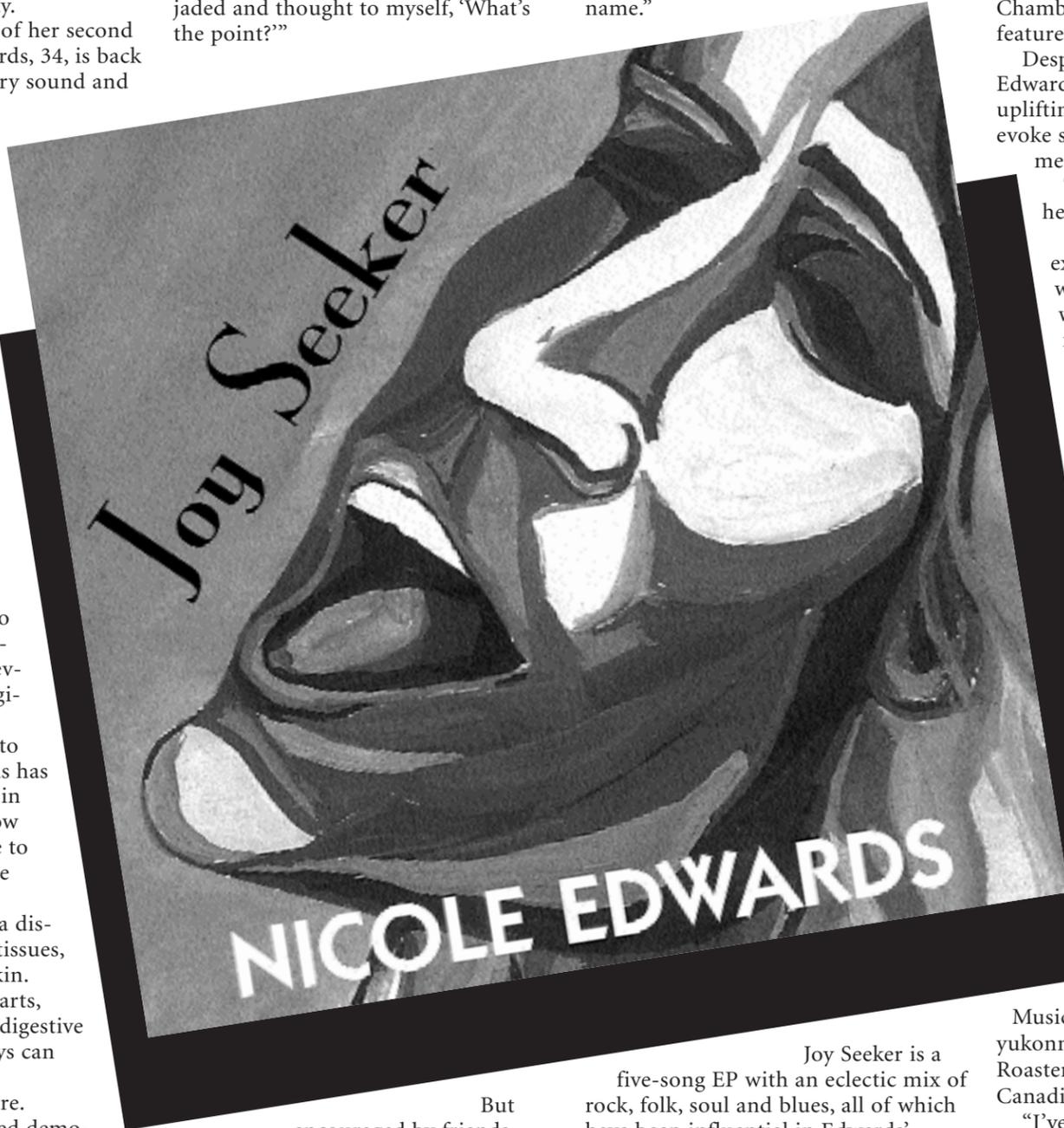
Having already received demogrant money from MusicYukon, Edwards had begun work on another album when she was diagnosed in 2001.

Tightening of her facial muscles and partial loss of mobility in her lips and tongue meant she had to give up the flute.

Due to the stiffening of her fingers and wrists, playing the guitar became increasingly difficult and painful, as did making the new album.

"As a musician, it was the greatest loss for me," she said. "I became so jaded and thought to myself, 'What's the point?'"

with this. Music helps me process it. People don't want to learn about things until someone they know is touched by illness. That is what this album is about. I'm sharing my story and putting a face to the name."



But encouraged by friends, family and the music industry, she took the money and the motivation and returned to the studio.

Partially to raise awareness and partially to help herself deal with her diagnoses, Edwards produced *Joy Seeker*.

"Songwriting is a tool for me to deal

Joy Seeker is a five-song EP with an eclectic mix of rock, folk, soul and blues, all of which have been influential in Edwards' career.

Her ability to change between styles, and even languages, is what inspires and draws people to her.

Being fully bilingual, the album also includes a French track, *Quand Je Te Vois*,

"I Love French," she said. "It's a

beautiful language. With Canada being such a bilingual country, I love the idea of intercultural sharing. It's fun! It adds to life."

Back-up vocals are provided by local musicians Ivan Zenovitch and Barbara Chamberlin, among others, as well as featured guest guitarist David Sinclair.

Despite the heavy lyrical content, Edwards hopes her fans find the album uplifting. The album is not meant to evoke sympathy or "poor Nicole" comments.

There is no hidden meaning in her songs and no want for pity.

Instead, it is the musical expression of an artist dealing with a life-changing disease while still finding joy and happiness in and around her life.

Joy Seeker, is "an album and a song about choosing how to play the cards you're dealt in life," she said.

"I recommend choosing joy. It's way more fun.

Sometimes it takes a crisis to realize that the real work to do is giving and receiving love."

June is Scleroderma Awareness Month and buying Edwards' CD will help raise the public profile of this little-known disease.

Support from the community and generous donations will also be put towards her ongoing medical expenses.

As Edwards is unable to perform or tour, *Joy Seeker* will be sold in limited quantities at Aroma Borealis, Rose

Music, BYTE, L'association franco-yukonnaise, Midnight Sun Coffee Roasters, MusicYukon and the Great Canadian Dollar Store.

"I've got this life to live / I will not give in / I don't know what lies ahead / So I'm going to be a joy seeker / So I'll surround myself by beauty / I'll surround myself with love ..."

That's exactly what Edwards is doing. And for more information on scleroderma please visit www.scleroderma.ca

Lien wins award and becomes ambassador

By Kira Steen
News Reporter

Winning a coveted Asian title without being Asian is something to shout about!

Yukon recording artist Matthew Lien won Best World Music Album at the recent Taiwan Music Awards.

He is the first westerner ever to have done so and also the first to win with a government-commissioned album.

Lien's album, *A Journey of Water*,

combines his original compositions with traditional Taiwanese music and environmental sounds.

"This is a great honour because it brings recognition to many great musicians who contributed to this project," Lien said in a release following his win.

"The old man singing in his tea field or the passionate Attayal aboriginal children, these are the great musicians of Taiwan."

Reaching superstardom status in 1996 with his first international release,

Bleeding Wolves, Lien has become a familiar name in the Taiwan Top 10 through the release of nine more albums.

He has been assisting the Taiwan government since 1999, using his music to bring awareness to the island nation's environmental and cultural issues, and once raised \$500,000 in relief aid when an earthquake shook the country.

Already the Canadian special envoy to Taiwan, Lien has been appointed cultural ambassador to Taiwan and has become an honorary citizen of the province of

Taitung in recognition of his "prominent contribution to the development and exchange of Taiwan's culture," said a release.

Though he will be in Asia until mid-July, Lien is also raising awareness about the endangered wilderness back home in the Yukon, and is currently working on the Caribou Commons Project, a short film hoping to go international and bring attention to the plight of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.