

Eclectic singer's new jazz album sparkles

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By Chris Oke *Special to the News*

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Nicole Edwards explores her jazz side in her new album, *Sparkin'*. The CD release party is Saturday at the Yukon Arts Centre.

For Nicole Edwards music is music, regardless of the genre.

This time her new album, *Sparkin'*, showcases her versatile singing voice gracefully tackling jazz.

Given the elegant ease that Edwards displays throughout the album, it's easy to forget that this is a complete genre switch for the artist.

Edwards' previous albums have all been in the singer/songwriter or folk-rock category with a little blues influence.

"But I've always loved jazz," said Edwards.

"When I was a little, I loved to sing and I always asked my mom to teach me songs. Those were the songs she knew — the jazz standards.

"So I learned a lot of songs just singing with my mom."

Mother and daughter would sing *On the Sunny Side of the Street* while out for a walk.

And while out berry picking the two could be heard belting out the lively *Five Foot Two Eyes of Blue*.

The new album offers up-beat interpretations of both of these classics along with eight other jazz standards.

Edwards has also written two originals for this, her third solo album: *We've Got Love* and the title track, *Sparkin'*.

The album was recorded live and perhaps for this reason it conjures up images of a smoky jazz lounge.

Although it was recorded in the studio, you can almost hear the clinking of glasses and whispers from the tables around you.

Then the spotlight shines on the singer at centre stage who draws you in as she croons soulfully, adding her own fun and flavour to each standard she sings.

The set presents a fine mixture of up-tempo toe-tappers and dark, bluesy numbers.

A few songs even show linguistic diversity, with Edwards singing in both French (La Vie en Rose) and Spanish (Besame Mucho).

She is accompanied by the solid piano and organ of Annie Avery, Jon Heaton on bass, Ed Write on drums and Sebastien Bujon on saxophone.

“I always thought that I’d get around to doing jazz sometime, and finally have,” she said.

Edwards enjoyed the genre switch.

She enjoyed it so much, in fact, that she will switch again and perform a waltz on the Yukon Women in Music compilation CD to be recorded this winter.

On January 19, Edwards will also be opening for Sam Roberts at Byte’s 10th Annual Youth Conference.

It’s fitting that she will take part in the 10th anniversary of the organization, considering that Edwards helped start it.

Fighting back tears Edwards apologized for getting emotional.

“It was just really nice that Byte involved me,” she said.

She hasn’t been able to participate with the organization since she had to leave five years ago because of an illness.

She has an autoimmune disease called scleroderma, which causes a hardening of the body’s connective tissue.

The effects are apparent in the skin but can affect the whole body. Edwards has it in her lungs and it’s also affected her esophagus.

Playing music has become difficult.

“I can’t play the flute or the guitar anymore because my hands are deformed and my mouth has changed,” said Edwards.

“That’s another reason that makes jazz really fun for me because I can just sing and not have to worry about my hands.”

Edwards is treating the disease with an alternative medicine known as hyperbaric oxygen therapy.

Nearly two years ago, a large fundraiser was held in Whitehorse to allow Edwards to try the treatment for the first time.

“It had a dramatic effect on my breathing — I’m really thankful that the community supported me to go do that,” she said.

“At the time I didn’t know if it would help or not, but it really has.

“I’m doing things I haven’t done in four years.”

There was no CD release party for Joy Seeker, the last disc Edwards put out, because she wasn’t able to perform live.

But lately she’s been performing more and is now organizing this concert.

Normally, Edwards has to perform seated but at the Halloween masquerade this year she was strong enough to perform her second set standing.

“There’s no way I could have done that a year ago.”

The Sparkin’ CD release party will be held this Saturday at the Yukon Arts Centre.

Opening for Edwards is the young swing quartet Come Eat a Cat.

Tickets are \$20 and will be limited, as the show will be held with cabaret style seating.