

# Mp3 Sarah Holgate - Welcoming The Night



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Moody, jazzy piano and vocals swinging from sweet to sultry and back again, set to a backdrop of a small jazz combo and occasional chamber orchestra. 13 MP3 Songs JAZZ: Traditional Jazz Combo, POP: Piano Details: from The Scranton Times-Tribune, June 5th, 2004 Spreading the Joy Local singer-songwriter-pianist to perform in support of debut album Friday at Scranton Cultural Center By Josh McAuliffe Staff Writer For Sarah Holgate, becoming a musical triple threat was a gradual process. First, she found she had an inborn knack for the piano. From there, she discovered her smoky, soulful voice didn't have to be confined to the privacy of her bedroom, and that the innermost thoughts she put to paper need not end up in the bottom of a wastebasket. All three skills will be on prominent display Friday night at the Scranton Cultural Center's Shopland Hall, where the 21-year-old singer-songwriter-pianist will perform selections from her debut album of jazz-inflected self-penned songs, "Welcoming The Night." Those who know Ms. Holgate wouldn't be surprised that she's gotten to this point. For her, the music's in the genes. She grew up in Benton Township, in a household full of musicians. Among her earliest memories is dad Cliff, sitting around playing guitar. When she was 7, dad sat her down in front of a piano. Before long, she was banging out "Mack the Knife," having picked it up completely by ear. "I don't know- it just fit with me," she said. From there, she began taking lessons with renowned local piano teacher Ray Cramer. According to him, the relationship didn't really heat up until a couple of years in, when one day, teacher had student play a piece by the Spanish composer Granados. "It was the first time I heard beauty in her playing," Mr. Cramer said. "Then we started to do all sorts of things." "She really is extraordinary." Singing's something Ms. Holgate has enjoyed since she was a tyke, although it took her a while to get up the nerve to do it in public. "I was shy about singing. I'd do it in my room, because I didn't want anyone to hear me," she said. "'The Little Mermaid.' I sang all the songs from that. I made up silly little songs."

Believe it or not, it was jazz crooner Harry Connick Jr. who helped her get over her bashfulness. The singer's smooth, low-key delivery made her realize that to be a singer she didn't need the world class pipes of a Celine Dion or Mariah Carey, the vocal dynamos who simultaneously inspired and discouraged her as a child. It was also around this time that she started writing. Of course, more often than not the results of her labors ended up in the garbage. "Sometimes I'm a little overly critical of myself," she said. One eventually saw the light of day - the aptly titled "The Creative Me Nobody Knows," a piece written for NEIU's Arts Alive program when she was 14. "That was a very important moment," she said. "It was such an amazing feeling. It was really neat hearing something I performed. I realized then that music was it for me." Ms. Holgate's prodigious piano skills got her into the prestigious Eastman School of Music in Rochester, N.Y. However, aside from a first-rate education in jazz and classical music, Eastman and Ms. Holgate were not a good match. The campus was too small for her liking. The students, too serious and single-minded of focus. The hours behind the piano, never-ending. "I'm glad I spent a year there, because of how much I learned. But, if I'm not enjoying it, I'd rather not be doing it at all," she said. "It made me realize why I started doing music - because I love it, not because I wanted to impress people." Returning home, Ms. Holgate found herself with an abundance of free time - time that could be spent writing. In a burst of creative energy, she wrote the bulk of her album's material in a one-month period during the winter of 2003. Her songs - most of which could be described as semi-autobiographical confessionals - eventually hit the ears of childhood friend and fellow musician Carl Shinko. "I went to see her play at Winston's Pub (in Waverly, where Ms. Holgate has regular gigs), and I thought, Wow, when did she learn how to sing?" Mr. Shinko said. Mr. Shinko was so impressed with Ms. Holgate's voice and songwriting skills that he decided to form his own record company, the Kingston-based Longfooter Productions, around her. "Carl really helped my confidence," she said. The recording process started in September and lasted into early winter. It was tedious, to say the least. They had to search far and wide for the perfect piano, eventually finding it at Bloomsburg University. The vocal parts, meanwhile, were recorded "all over the place," she said. If anything, the album has proven to be a good distraction for Ms. Holgate. Back in January, her brother, David, died during a snowboarding accident at Elk Mountain. In his honor, she wrote "Heaven Holds You," the CD's final track. "It helped," she said. "(David's death) made me realize even more how important family is." One thousand copies of "Welcoming The Night" have been pressed. So far, about 300 copies have been sold, good enough to recoup the initial \$5,000 investment,

Mr. Shinko said. In addition, the album has found its way to the airwaves. WVIA-FM disc jockey George Graham recently played a few tracks on his "Mixed Bag" program. Ms. Holgate has a lot on her plate at the moment. She's teaching piano, with a current roster of six students. And she's back at school, having transferred to Penn State University. One semester in, the music education and performance major has a 3.75 GPA. Eventually, she'd like to send her stuff to major record labels. For now, though, she'll continue developing her sound. No need to rush things. "Where I want to go with my music career is still forming," she said. "It's still all very new to me." Which isn't to say Ms. Holgate doesn't have big plans, because she does. Her "perfect life," as she puts it, would be to regularly put out albums and perform her songs around the country, where at each stop she would hold music workshops for aspiring kid musicians. "I consider myself really, really lucky. Because I feel so lucky, I think I should give back," she said. "What I think I should be doing - and this sounds corny, but I believe it - is to spread the joy of music."

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