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nightlife: A poet's grace, a singer's voice

Silandara Bartlett
Staff Writer

It's not easy to dance to acoustic guitar. But JoAnn Vaccaro makes you want to try.

Her sound can be described as a mix of Linda Perry vocals (of 4 Non Blondes fame) put to Ani DiFranco-like guitar strumming. Vaccaro describes it as "flamenco-type strumming patterns in a folk-rock base," ranging from bluesy tunes to jazzy ballads to a little slide guitar. She's got a strong voice (and thankfully doesn't possess Perry's tendency to scream), and she produces a surprisingly complex, full sound for just one woman and a guitar.

Vaccaro started down the music road as a kid on the clarinet, quickly followed by a short stint on the trumpet. In seventh grade, she decided her future was in the guitar. "My parents didn't think I'd stick with it," she says, and they refused to help her buy one. So she saved up baby-sitting money and bought a Dean Playmate electric guitar and set about learning to play it by imitating Guns-N-Roses.

Then fate intervened. A power outage in the middle of a guitar solo in a high school competition convinced her to go acoustic. Combined with her penchant for poetry, it clicked.

After entertaining Rochester-area audiences for more than six years, the 24-year-old musician has learned a thing or two about the biz.

Lugging around gear in the winter months is high on the list of least enjoyable activities. "As a one-woman act, sometimes that can be a real pain," she says.

So can facing a crowd that's not receptive to original music. "There are some great original musicians in this area, and there are people who really appreciate it — just not as many as mainstream radio cover bands can turn out."

Listening to original music is harder than listening to tunes we've heard over and over again.

"The synapses in your brain haven't routed the 'original music' yet, so it is not always easy listening at first try," Vaccaro notes. "It's always 'easier' to listen to the songs we've heard a thousand times before; but we sometimes forget that all cover tunes were original at some point. People just gotta put in the time to listen to original songs."



Lisa Carp

JoAnn Vaccaro, 24, describes her music as "flamenco-type strumming patterns in a folk-rock base."

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When you do, it pays off, and quickly. After hearing her a couple of times, your synapses and toes get into the groove. That said, most original acts do some covers, and Vaccaro is no exception. What is different is her take on cover songs. For example, her version of Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive" is completely unexpected — and definitely not for purists.

Her third release, *My Love*, is due out this fall. "It's a less-is-more album, scaling back instrumentally and getting back to my roots," she says. Her second release, 2002's *Reach Out*, is available at local Record Archive stores and online at CDbaby.com.



Upcoming shows

Friday, May 21, 6:30 to 8 p.m., Lilac Festival Conservatory Stage, near Lamberton Conservatory, Highland Park. Saturday, June 12, 8 to 11 p.m., Buffalo Coffee Works, 2072 Kensington Ave., Amherst. Call: (716) 839-9990.

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