

Pop Talk: Troy is getting notice as a budding indie powerhouse

by *George_Varga*

Attending Boston's Berklee College of Music has proven inspirational to musicians as varied as John Mayer, Melissa Etheridge and "Tonight Show" bandleader Kevin Eubanks. But it only took a two-day visit to Berklee last fall for Anna Troy to gain new inspiration for her craft.

ANNA TROY - 'Playing blues is an amazing feeling because it's such a spiritual art form,' says Anna Troy, 23. CNS Photo by John Gastaldo. "I was so happy to meet really talented musicians my own age, who were all great songwriters doing original material," she said.

"It took me out of my comfort zone and made me realize there's something else out there. Berklee is such a rich creative environment, unlike anything I'd ever experienced. It sort of changed my life, because it allowed me to open up creatively in a way I haven't."

Troy is now at work on a new album, "Catch the Rain," with the one-woman, three-man band that bears her name. It will follow 2006's blues-drenched "Ain't No Man," her promising solo debut. Only 23, she is blessed with an unusually powerful and expressive voice that is rivaled only by Grand Ole Party's Kristin Gundred, also 23.

Troy is also a gifted songwriter who has earned praise from seasoned musicians more than twice her age.

"She's like this tsunami of talent," said former Steve Miller Band guitarist Greg Douglass, who is now writing songs with Troy and has worked with Van Morrison, Bo Diddley, Paul Butterfield and the Greg Kihn Band.

"I heard Anna's first CD and couldn't believe she was just 21 when she made it. I'm 58 and have been in the music business for over 40 years, so it's refreshing to be around someone with her enthusiasm and energy. I've

had two or three top-quality songwriting partners over the past 30 years and Anna's definitely one of them."

Troy teaches guitar four days a week at San Diego's Blue Guitar, where her nearly 30 students range in age "from 6 to 60." She also works as a volunteer at Alphabiotics Center of San Diego, which she credits with helping her overcome the carpal tunnel problems brought on by her constant guitar playing.

A piano student from the age of 4 to 12, Troy did not develop her passion for music until she was in the sixth grade. It was then that her father, Sandy Troy, an attorney and author of an acclaimed 1995 biography of the Grateful Dead's Jerry Garcia, gave her a guitar and taught her a few chords.

Within five years she and her sister, Lindsey, 21, were signed by Elektra Records and pop stardom beckoned. What followed was both exhilarating and nightmarish.

Elektra spared no expense grooming the duo, who were billed as The Troy Sisters and were signed after recording an impressive demo under the guidance of veteran singer-songwriter Cindy Lee Berryhill. But the label quickly sought to reinvent the sisters as a two-in-one version of Avril Lavigne, whose career was then igniting.

The resulting album, while accomplished, was a slick music-biz product that only hinted at the heartfelt essence of the siblings' music in its original form. Before it could be released, Elektra imploded in 2003 and The Troy Sisters were history. Anna Troy couldn't have been happier.

"Getting dropped by Elektra was actually empowering," she said. "My hero at the time was Ani DiFranco, and she still is, so I wanted to be an independent artist. Elektra was pretty controlling about who we worked with and the style of our songs. They had people pick our clothes out and paid for us to go to certain salons. So, it was really liberating when we got dropped."

Troy credits four noted San Diego musicians - fellow Blue Guitar teacher Robin Henkel, David Beldock, Nathan James and, in particular, Bart Mendoza (now a member of her band) - as her biggest mentors.

"Robin really got me into the blues and my first album is nearly all blues," said Troy. "But I had really bad writer's block in 2007. And, after visiting Berklee, I realized I can't force myself to just write blues. Now, I'm listening to all styles of music so that I can get more influences and see what happens."

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