

Alternative Rock Review

An Interview with Lorraine Devon Wilke



Interview by guest contributor Roger "Red" Byrne

Singer/songwriter Lorraine Devon Wilke is not, to put it bluntly, going to feed you bullshit. In a market cluttered with the fake and superficial, she is an honest voice, ringing true with lyrics that spill their guts with words of pain and happiness. The latter is significant because it's easy to focus on the flesh wounds on her record instead of the mended hearts. The following is Wilke, up close and personal.

Red Byrne: Your album is laden with some fairly miserable confessions. Were you concerned that people might stereotype you as being an angst-ridden female?

Female, yes; angst-ridden...I don't think so. Assuming people get beyond the first cut, which does have a certain poetic misery to it, I'm confident they'll see enough of a spectrum to dispel any impulse to stereotype me! Because in spite of the fact that heartache and sorrow are two of the most revered themes of all time, I'm a big believer in the life-in-balance theory, the idea that

we experience it all, good, bad, and somewhere in between, and my writing reflects that. Let me prove my point: the first song, "Drowning"...yes, OK, that's just downright sad, but after "Drowning," look at the next few songs: "You Say I Say": a saucy tongue-in-cheek smack down; "Comfort Me": OK, again sad, but mixed with righteous anger and some wistfulness; "Believer": now, this one is just downright happy, a gospel-tinged joyful-noise kinda thing about unmitigated faith in the power of love; "My Good Good Man": come on, anyone who hears this song knows I'm not angst-ridden...it's all about that pure, simple guy who just got it right. And it goes on from there, weaving through themes of redemption ("Healer," "Like a Child"), apology ("Misguided"), defiance ("It's Not Over") and longing ("My Search For You"), ending in "Richer For Rain," which is quite simply an epiphany - the discovery that while life doesn't always deliver the plan, it sometimes comes up with something better. So there is an arch to the whole thing...heartache to revelation and hope. That's important to me. So we'll hope listeners get beyond "Drowning" to experience some of my perkier sides.

RB: When you write songs about a painful experience from the past, do you relive those moments in your head or are the wounds still fresh?

Both. I've heard people say that happiness is the bane of a good songwriter, but frankly, with memory and imagination available, that isn't necessarily so. In my case, anyone who reads my bio or CD liner notes knows I'm happily married (to "My Good Good Man") and raising a child, but happy or not, I still experience those moments when life kicks your heart out. And like anyone else with a soul and the ability to think and feel, I see fresh hurt all around me as well, so in writing it's a mix of reliving moments as well as facing some that sit right on your doorstep. "My Search for You" is about my relationship with my father who died in early December of 1999...that one was pretty close to the surface. "It's Not Over" is the personification of a time when I was told I had no relevance as an artist because I'd dared to get older. On the other hand, "Drowning" was inspired by a story I saw on TV; "Comfort Me" was completely imagined, and others were inspired by people in my life struggling with their own pain. But whatever the source, there's not an emotion on this record I don't know or haven't felt, so it was all there to be readily tapped.

RB: Was it a conscious decision to have certain share of emotionally upbeat tracks on the record, or did you actually come up with those lyrics first?

When I write, the focus is always on the emotional heartbeat of the song at hand without consideration for plotting a good song list or providing a mood change from any other song. Afterwards, when you're assembling the recorded material in an order, you certainly put some thought into creating balance in terms of rhythm, tempo, and mood, but not during the writing process. I wrote this album with an extraordinarily talented guitarist and songwriter named Rick M. Hirsch, and while two of the songs ("It's Not Over" and "Richer For Rain") originated with lyrics and melodies I brought to him for instrumental tracking, in most cases he would give me pieces of music - chord progressions, song parts, fully realized instrumentals - I'd pick the ones I had some emotional response to and I'd live with the piece until I found its melody and lyrics. It didn't matter whether the music was upbeat or not; it was always about whether it moved me in some way to tell the story it evoked. Obviously, at the end of the day it just so happened that some of those stories were upbeat, some were stormy, so we happily embraced the variety.

Visit the website at: <http://www.lorrainedevonwilke.com>

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