

The curse of being a blacktopGYPSY

The pleasure and lessons learned as a six-piece band and family on the road.

by Tom Geddie

ANDIE KAY JOYNER IS CURSED. SHE SAYS so herself. But it's not a bad thing. In fact, it's a good thing for those of us who like music.

Joyner is a singer and guitarist and half of the front of the band blacktopGYPSY, with Heather Stalling on fiddle, guitar, and vocals. The "back" of the band is Stalling's sister Darcy Starcher on supporting vocals; Jay New on bass; Phillip Cordon on drums; and Steven Cooper on lead guitar.

The band plays all over the greater Dallas-Fort Worth area and some points beyond. It's most recent CD is *Whirlwind*, mostly a mix of love and lost love and even longing love songs that are country without much twang. Joyner calls the music a mixture of influences.

"Let's say Merle Haggard, Fleetwood Mac, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Bill Monroe, John Denver, Willie Nelson, Aretha Franklin, and The Allman Brothers were at a jam session together," she said.

Stalling hopes the live shows are as much fun as that lineup would be.

"We are a six-piece band family," she said. "I think it shows in our live shows how much we love what we do, and I can't say that for a lot of acts that I see these days. We are not in this for the money, just the simple pleasure we get from making music together."

So, what's Joyner's self-diagnosed curse?

The music

"MUSIC IS HAPPY, SAD, OR funny stories about real and fictional characters. A melody, alone or a steel guitar solo can make you feel pain on your best day or happiness on your worst," she said. "I have the curse, and I've known it since I was about 5 or 6 years old. When you think about it, it's really strange to be driven

to pour your heart out in a song about personal issues, stand on a stage, and sing and play it in front of a crowd. I must be crazy, but I wouldn't trade it for anything."

The evolution of blacktopGYPSY might seem slow, but it's a natural progression. Joyner and Stalling have been friends since they were 14 or 15, first meeting at the old Kaufman Country Opry.

They played separately and together in several Texas bands including with Ed Burleson, Mark David Manders, Tommy Alverson, Bob Schneider, Johnny Lee, and others before finally going out on their own with a nearly year-long Tuesday night residency at the popular, funky Adair's.

"We wanted to do things our own way," Joyner said. "I enjoyed being a backup singer, but I don't learn a new song every now and then and just show up at the gig anymore. Heather and I had a huge change when we decided we wanted to have a band of our own. We are blacktopGYPSY's booking agents, bookkeepers, road managers, merchandise coordinators, etc. The five minutes on stage is well worth all of the hard work, and we have a great group of gypsies that help us along the way, as well."

She is inspired by good live shows, by great CDs, and by Stalling.

"Every now and then, I find old CDs that I love, and it makes me want to work on new material or go back to unfinished songs. Also, road trips and girl talk with Heather inspire me. We'll be in the middle of gabbing, and one of us will stop and say, 'What did you just say?'"

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They have been friends since they were 14 or 15, first meeting at the old Kaufman Country Opry: Heather Stalling and Andie Kay Joyner

"Get a pen! Get the guitar!" She will not be nailed down to a favorite song in the band's eclectic repertoire.

"That's picking a favorite child," she said, citing "If I Were You," "Voices," and "Butterfly" — but not necessarily in that order. "If I Were You" is the first song she and Stalling wrote together. She likes the sad, country songs like "Voices" that "hurt you all over again each time you hear them." She likes the story of "Butterfly, the minors, the harmonies, and Stalling's fiddle solo.

Okay, if she can't pick a favorite song of her own, how about one from somebody else?

"There isn't an actual number, but I am certain that I have close to 500 favorite songs," she said. "I love all genres of music, but I'm a sucker for sad, country songs about heartache."

Somewhere close to the top of that list would be something by George Jones, Merle Haggard, Willie Nelson, Patsy Cline, or Tammy Wynette, she said. Maybe "Good Year for the Roses" or "What Am I Gonna Do For the Rest of My Life" or "You Take Me for Granted" or "I Fall to Pieces," "3 Days," or "Till I Can Make it On My Own."

"No, I don't have a favorite. I love many, all the same," Joyner said.

Joyner's parents remain her biggest influence.

"They were my music teach-

ers and my first band. When I was a child, they worked hard during the week and then sacrificed their free time on the weekends for me," she said.

"They encouraged me to sing as often and as many different places as I could. They have never told me that music is a hobby and to get a real job. They have always known music is my passion, and they have supported me every step of the way."

Other influences include many friends in this business "who do not have 401Ks, company vehicles, retirement plans, medical insurance, or annual raises," she said.

"What they do have is a gift, a guitar, and a song. They have 25 people that come see them play in a bar on a Wednesday night, when they could be home with their spouse and their kids, and they sing and play that song like they are performing on the Grand Ole Opry. That is someone to be admired."

Stalling is also influenced by "most of the people I have met" in the Texas music scene.

"These are people that truly care about their songs and actu-

ally have something to say. They pride themselves on being unique and refuse to ever become a sell-out. They more than often don't make much money, but are in the business for all of the right reasons: the pure and simple love of music, and sharing that music with anyone who dares to listen."

Mostly, Joyner said, she appreciates the fans.

"I just would like to say thank you to every person who pays a cover charge, buys a CD, puts a dollar in the tip jar, pays money for a babysitter so they can go out and support live music —

anyone who has a dream of opening a live music venue. Without these wonderful people, we wouldn't be able to do what we love to do, and we are forever grateful." ■

Among 10 July gigs, blacktopGYPSY will be at *The Forge in Ben Wheeler* on July 12, *Hot Summer Nights in Sherman* on July 19, *Big Barn BBQ in North Richland Hills* on July 20, *The Woodshed Smokehouse in Fort Worth* at noon and *Filthy McNasty's Saloon during the evening* on July 21, and *Love and War in Texas (Grapevine)* on July 25.



The band includes Heather Stalling, Andie Kay Joyner, Darcy Starcher, Jay New, Phillip Cordon and Steven Cooper: blacktopGYPSY