

Her songs share compassion and empathy.

Wendy Colonna was close to burn out before focusing on *Nectar*, is back with a new outlook
By Tom Geddie

WENDY COLONNA CALLS IT A BLESSING to surrender to the creative process for her album *Nectar*, which was released regionally last fall but is just now in the midst of a national push for listeners.

The national and international performance and promotional tour includes dates with acts as diverse as Jeff Buckley, Tony Joe White, Mavis Staples, Trombone Shorty, Los Lobos, Marcia Ball, Asleep at the Wheel, Bob Schneider, Collective Soul, Edgar Winter, Delbert McClinton, and others.

At home back in Louisiana to be with her family for a few days in April, the Austin-based Colonna mentioned an Alice Walker documentary where the author, talking about writing "The Color Purple," said her relationships with her characters became so close that they become — in a way — real people to her.

There's a little bit of that feeling, Colonna said, in the songs on *Nectar*. As a listener, I certainly agree.

She calls the songs "invitations to compassion."

"Bring Me Water"

MY FAVORITE OF THE 11 songs is "Bring Me Water," about seeking reconciliation that may or may not be offered:

"When I die,
bury me in my madness,
swaddle me and my secrets
in a blanket of truth
when I die,
please forgive me my weakness,
sing to me of the sweetness
of the red autumn moon
but before I'm buried and
by
and while the love is still alive
bring me water, bring me
grace

let the rain fall down upon
my face
let the blossoms grow
from the wounds that betray."

"Mother Forgive Us," is about mercy and our accountability to each other and our relationship with Earth and society, sounds like — without copying — an Eliza Gilkyson song, which, to me, is high praise.

Another of the fine songs on *Nectar* is "Girl Without A Name," which producer Mark Addison wrote for the album, tells us that we are all together — ultimately not alone — dreaming on forever.

Colonna called making this album "a really magical process," saying it involved "a lot of surrender. I made a lot of commitment after sitting back for a couple of years. It had to all come from a place of grace," she said. That's why "Bring Me Water" is on the album. The ballads are really powerful but they are not going to chart.

"What would you do if you couldn't fail; more powerfully, what would you do whether you failed or not?" The answer: "Putting out a record like this with really human, confessional songs, coming to terms with self and relationships."

What's more likely to chart is a good song like "Dirty Things," the opener on which Colonna decides — with some humor — to examine the vices that make her — or her character — human.

The *Wall Street Journal* picked Colonna as one of the musical



Wall Street Journal made her one of its picks for best acts at SXSW for 2014: Wendy Colonna

acts to see at South by Southwest for 2014, saying that she "invites listeners to taste the sweetness of life in stories of surrender, mortality and redemption."

Houston Music Review said: "soulful tunes of innocent sin."

The *San Antonio Express-News* said: "A soulful performer, Colonna digs deep for her words and sings them with the kind of swamp/soul conviction that draws listeners in and keeps them in."

Colonna describes her own music as "roots-based," but not exclusively roots.

"I'm a big fan of the American roots tradition. I like a lot of styles, so I play a lot of different

styles. It's kinda soulful, kinda southern feeling," she said.

"The writing — the actual lyricism, the sort of melodic and poetic part — is just a product of wanting to write on a lot of different levels: to speak to the heart and to the part that likes to boogie. I'm a yoga practitioner, so I think of chakras, the energies in the body, where this song is going in the body," she said.

Her southern Louisiana influences are all over *Nectar*.

"It seems like the more local color you put into songs, the more people get into them," she said. "It's weird. It's cool. I see it in other artists, too."

Living in Austin for 14 years

is an influence, too.

"This is such a great and diverse songwriting community. About seven years ago, I realized all the CDs in my car were Austin artists. That's a testament to the quality of the music in Austin," she said.

"Lately — as I've been touring more nationally — I've been expanding. What influences me the most maybe isn't style, but the courage of the trailblazers like Doug Sahm and Willie Nelson who didn't restrict themselves to one genre because sometimes that can be a handicap to people who want to market you in little boxes."

What's most important to

Colonna in her songs is make connections.

"Lots of people have different priorities. I personally feel my gift is just to have real compassionate, empathetic connections so that somebody feels it — whatever it is — in the song," she said. "This world we live in is a world of distraction and numbing. The medicine of music is feeling. That's what I'd like to continually cultivate in my own writing — to not feel censored about feelings. Humans are hungry for feelings."

Colonna came close to burn out before focusing on *Nectar*.

"I've always loved my job, but at a certain point when I was on the road touring it wore my body out and I got sick," she said. "When my body wore down, my immune system crashed and I started getting every bug."

"For singing, I needed my body to work. It seemed like there was a point of diminishing returns where I just got weaker and weaker. I had to stop and regroup and reassess my role and my relationship with music, writing, and recording. If that was my gift to the world, I had to figure out a different way to share it."

"When I realized I had so much to give the world but I wasn't able to act on it, I regrouped for about two years."

Colonna never stopped performing, but learned to differentiate between what she was doing to survive and what she was doing to thrive.

"That's two different ways of looking at life. I could start writing more purely again because my survival was taken care of with my other jobs. That was really healing for me," she said. "Because I didn't rely on it to survive, I began to thrive again. I shifted my perspective with money and abundance and service, getting my ego out of the way."

"This is a job of service, not serving the self but showing up with what's being offered — being a student of the artwork."

In addition to touring with *Nectar*, Colonna may begin writing for a new record this summer. Otherwise, her plans are simple: "Music is a challenging profession; we continue to show up." And, "Stay out of trouble, I hope." And, "Try your best and live without regret. That's been my personal philosophy since I was a teenager." ■

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