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Former Tucsonan doesn't ignore muse



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Kathleen Williamson will play two Tucson shows this weekend.

By Cathalena E. Burch

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Singer/songwriter Kathleen Williamson went back to college in August and she has a confession: She's probably not studying as hard as she should.

She's back home in her native New York City, attending Yeshiva University law school in the city's heart. She's getting a postdoctoral law degree in intellectual property and entertainment law, two areas that interest her far more than the criminal law she has spent her legal career practicing.

Last summer, Williamson closed her 16-year-old private practice in Tucson, putting the cap on a criminal law career that included work in the prosecutor's office and serving as a judge pro tem.

In a cell phone call while riding a city bus in Greenwich Village heading to class, Williamson explains that entertainment law fits more into her interests. Music and writing songs constitute her passion, what gets her up in the morning, what keeps her going late into the night, she said.

"I don't care what's going on in my life, when the muse visits me, I drop everything. I commune with that," she confessed, her New York accent more pronounced than

when she left Tucson a few months ago. "I'm just at a point in my life where I'm not ignoring it anymore."

Williamson, who divides her time and attention between school and New York's music scene, has been particularly inspired since releasing her months-old album "The Sacred Spud."

Her muse must surely have visited her when she penned the playful autobiographical blues rocker "Don't Make a Scene, Kathleen." The song features vocal help from blues/jazz singer Lisa Otey and musical accompaniment from her friends: Otey, Ed Delucia, Ralph Gilmore, Sabra Faulk, Steve Willis, Kathy Bayley, Duncan Stitt, Todd Hammes and Richie Cavanagh.

The album is steeped in neotraditional glory, including the stellar steel-guitar play from the late Hal Rugg. The album marked the legendary steel player's final recording; he died last summer soon after the album was released.

Rugg's lonesome whine flavors several songs, including the tongue-in-cheek, music-industry basher "Good Ole' Fashioned UnAmericana." But it is most predominant on the neotraditional country ode "Lookin' for a Saviour."

The album also dips into country's more modern side with the kicker "Texas Hold 'Em."

Williamson will play cuts from the record when she performs a homecoming show Saturday at Javalina's Coffee & Friends. She also will be part of an ensemble cast of local musical luminaries for a Hurricane Katrina relief fund-raiser on Sunday.

Williamson says she's anxious to come home. Her heart, she says, is still very much in Tucson.

But New York has struck a creative nerve, admits the 52-year-old who left home in her early 20s and spent 15 years in Jerome before coming to Tucson to study law at the University of Arizona. She also has a doctoral degree that she earned in 2000.

"It took me 31 years in the desert to come back and appreciate these great big trees," she said, stepping off the bus and maneuvering her way through the honking horns and crowds of pedestrians. "There's a great buzz here. I love it. I'm having a great time."

"My main thing is I just want to write songs more than anything else. I want to have the time and the visitation with the muse to keep writing songs. I just think the arts are just so much more powerful than the law. The arts are the means, not the end."

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