

EVERYTHING BEGINS IN THE HUMAN HEART

SUSIE GLAZE - A SINGER WITH A MISSION

By DENNIS ROGER REED

"Everything begins in the human heart..." That's the first thing you hear spoken by Susie Glaze on her recording *Home on the Hill* before she starts singing *Come All You Fair and Tender Ladies*. It's a dramatic beginning to a smoothly accomplished recording.

Since Susie arrived on the So Cal scene as a member of the The Eight Hand String Band, and then released her solo debut *Home on the Hill*, audiences and listeners have been struck by the traditional values in her material, and by her assured, striking vocal capabilities. But vocal chops alone do not make for a compelling performer, and Susie has much more to offer than what Mother Nature granted to her vocal chords, and what Susie honed by years of classical voice training.

Raised in Tennessee, Susie points out that her parents weren't Southerners, but transplanted Mid-Westerners. There actually wasn't much country music around the house, but the nature of the region was such that country couldn't be avoided. Susie watched Flatt and Scruggs on television, and became an acute observer and listener of the people and music of her region. As a teen, she also performed with her singer-songwriter brother at local open mikes.

Venturing to New York for a musical theater career, she studied light opera and musical theater, but found that when she did perform country or folk music, people really responded. "Growing up in Tennessee gave me an idea of how it's supposed to sound," says Susie. Eventually the desire to sing folk and country music superceded her desire to perform in musical theater.

Susie had met the members of the folk/bluegrass group The Eight Hand String Band during her theater career in New York. They had formed in the mid-1990's, and the band is comprised of actors who are also adept musicians. Susie explains "When we all moved out to California, I started working with them as a full fledged member. We did a CD called *The Simple Truth*. When I played with them, people would always come up and ask, where's your CD?" The Eight Hand String Band includes Susie's actor/musician husband Steve Rankin. Rankin produced *Home on the Hill* and is a talented songwriter and mandolin player as well.

Susie has a well-known mentor in the famed Kentucky Appalachian dulcimer player, singer, songwriter and folk icon Jean Ritchie. Always a fan of Ritchie's songs, Susie had recorded several and had emailed Ritchie to see if Glaze could send her these recordings. Susie found the folk legend quite approachable, and very supportive. They have since met when both were performing at folk festivals, and a fast friendship has formed. According to Susie, the most important part of Jean Ritchie's mentorship has been the "spirituality that is interlaced in every note of the old songs. There's a massive amount of grace in what she does." Susie feels strongly about this. "It's a great privilege to share those stories with new audiences." She goes on to say this about Ritchie: "I believe that in her writing you can understand a little about her grace, and especially about the role that the music plays in our lives - to bring the blessings that music carries to each individual who hears it and is open. The reason for art is to heal."

Susie is a student of the history of folk music, but not in the specific, facts and dates rote. She has obviously given a lot of thought to what folk music means to the listener, and what role folk music can play in one's life. "The people of that generation (Pete Seeger, Jean Ritchie, etc.) knew what is transcendent about this material. They were standing up here singing not just because it felt good, but to impart something to the audience.



PHOTO BY MARY ANN HALPIN

To me, one of my goals is to develop these old tunes and present them with new songs that are similar to them. It's the stories that are important. I want to expand that, bring it to more people."

Susie also champions the modern folk songwriter, and has covered tunes by some of the new female authors of this music, such as Lucinda Williams, Gillian Welch, Iris Dement and Laurie Lewis. "I believe these woman are writing new classics." She's quick to point out "It's not just that they're writing solely from a woman's standpoint... they're writing about situations that modern women face, but they're timeless situations."

Susie's an eloquent spokesperson for a higher

calling than simple entertainment. She clarifies this concept. "There is so much in our lives that is lived on a superficial level. What the songs do is bring the reminder of the pervasiveness of the spirit in all we do, the fact of our nature being a spiritual one, that we are beings given life from a great creator, and that our lives are more poetical and grace-filled that we allow ourselves to recognize — and we forget this in all our rushing, and getting and hunting. So this is what I want to give those who listen to the songs that I do - the truth in the stories (of the songs) illuminates our own lives so that we can see what is really there."

Poetic, and parallel with a thought Jean Ritchie recently shared with Susie. Ritchie had been discussing the difficult times we live in, and how recording sales were slow. "But you and I know in our hearts that music soothes, comforts, calms, counsels, listens, advises, understands, lets us weep when we need to, cheers us when we'll let it. So, sales or not, we will keep on singing... That's not meant as a preaching- just pure Stream-of-Consciousness."

Home on the Hill has gathered superlative reviews, and Susie's performing schedule keeps her busy. In July and August, you can catch her at Friday, July 11th at Bean Town in Sierra Madre with the Eight Hand String Band; on Saturday and Sunday, July 26-27 she'll be with Eight Hand again at the Second Annual Great American Bluegrass and Acoustic Music Festival in Hesperia; on Tuesday, August 5 she'll grace the North County Bluegrass & Folk Club night at the Round Table Pizza in Escondido; and on Saturday, August 16 she shares *The Living Tradition* Concert Series bill in Anaheim with the dynamic Christina Ortega.

REVIEWS BY TOM "TEARAWAY" SCHULTE

CD REVIEW

A RE-INTRODUCTION TO NICK DRAKE

Nick Drake has an eerie, melancholy feel to his folk-pop. Each song could be misted rays of hope breaking through from a recent cry. This moody atmosphere combined with a history of reclusion and mental instability culminating in a lethal antidepressant overdose that was either suicide or accident guaranteed a cult following. Rykodisc helped foster that following with the 1994 compilation *Way to Blue: An Introduction to Nick Drake*. This album compiles material from the singer-songwriter's three albums including the song *Pink Moon*. That song's appearance in a 2000 Volkswagen commercial gave the Drake songbook new popularity. Universal Music Group (<http://www.umusic.com>) is reissuing *Way to Blue* package along with each of singer's albums. These all came out on Island originally and the reissues are part of the *Universal Chronicles* series (<http://www.universalchronicles.com>). His debut album *Five Leaves Left* patented the Drake sound and hopeless lyrics like "life is but a memory...happened long ago". This is from *Fruit Tree* the poignant commentary on fame that also became the name for the Drake box set. Bryter Layter is somewhat peppier. This is mostly due to the rhythm section, some string arrangements and some tinkling piano. In front of all this with his acoustic guitar, Drake is unchanged. The final album in this trilogy is the stark *Pink Moon*. He recorded it unaccompanied and dropped the tapes in the mail. It is quintessential Nick Drake, a beautiful sadness that still resonates today.

DVD REVIEW

LONG JOHN BALDRY - LIVE IN CONCERT

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This 1993 German concert from the tall bluesman with the deep voice comes in between the two *Stony Plain* albums *It Still Ain't Easy* (1991) and *On Stage Tonight: Baldry's Out* (1993). It makes a nice companion to these two CDs, because of the similar arrangements and some of the same material, like *Shake that Thing*, *Everyday I Have the Blues*, *Insane Asylum* and *Do You Wanna Dance?*. The powerful rendition of Dixon's *Insane Asylum* is the first song in the set featuring Kathi McDonald. She really belts out this song with feeling and power recalling how her long collaboration with Baldry has made her integral to some of his best material. She shows her softer side on *I'd Rather Go Blind*. Baldry and McDonald duet excellently on *A Thrill's A Thrill* and the folk-blues styled *Black Girl*.

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