

Chartbuster helps Turners women record new cd

BY BARBARA STEWART
TURNERS FALLS

*"Wounded woman, stretch out your hand
Wounded woman, stretch out your hand
Maybe one day soon, you will know how to stand.
Crying children, do you know where your parents are?
Crying children, do you know where your parents are?
Maybe one day soon, you will heal from that scar.
Freedom is yours today
This train don't run on Sundays anymore
Freedom is yours today
Just like New England weather, you have the right to change."
(From "Wounded Woman", by Beth Ann Weinert).*

This haunting melody, accompanied only by a slowly beating drum, and a plaintive flute at the end, emerges from the CD player at the Turners Falls Women's Resource Center, and fills the room with its strong vocals. I am seated at a table with Robin Lane, a musician, poet, creative whirlwind, and teacher; Maria Rodman, the vibrant Director of the Center, and also a contributor to the CD, and most of the women whose songs are featured on the CD. This is a CD party marking the midway point of CD creation by Robin Lane and her song writing workshop class. It's entitled "The Color of Joy: A Woman's Voice", and it plays in the background at this get together, which also celebrates the ending of a 12 week song writing workshop. As women drop in, bringing treats, we smile and laugh, and listen to the incredible music that they themselves created. There is a feeling of happiness in the room, of accomplishing something far out of the ordinary for most of these women - the opportunity to actually brainstorm, write a

song, and then collaborate in the actual creation of that song.

*"Viola Faye
You were everything your family ever needed
Dreams torn away
You were strong and never were defeated
...And you took all your pain
It became your strength."
(from Viola Faye, by Rebecca Lane)*

Viola Faye was Rebecca's grandmother and she sings these lyrics in a full-bodied voice that is so strong, so perfectly pitched, that no-one would ever guess that this was her first songwriting experience. Some of the women who attended the workshop come from abusive backgrounds. Some do not. (For this reason, I chose to use only the initials of the songwriters, although their names do appear on the play list of the CD). Sometimes the author sings her song, and sometimes Robin does the vocals -but the result is a fantastic assortment of music, eminently listenable. Even in its unfinished state - there are 6 tracks that Robin says still need some final touches, or remixing - the CD is earthy, vibrant, and powerful, much like the women who created it. The CD is so good, that I play it in the car most days driving to work, and don't tire of listening to the songs and the stories behind them.

*"Don't want to live under a rock
On the promise I'll see the sun again
I don't want to search for what's been lost
I haven't missed it since I don't know when.
I've got a plan to get away
I'm gonna sanctify my soul
I'm gonna take a chance and set the stage
I'm gonna make it to the show.*

*On the moment when everything changes
It's here where we start to shine
And head on forth and the truth is told in the silence
Here in the heart of time."
(from 'Everything Changes', by Denise Blair)*

What these women have in common is an interest in attending a song writing workshop, and a story to tell. Robin talks like a proud mother, beaming as she listens to her progenies' creation. "You won't believe some of these voices," says Robin. "Writing a song fulfilled the desire of these women to have their voices heard." Maria Rodman, the Director of the Women's Resource Center, explains that women feel safe here. "This is a place where women can be encouraged to speak and sing. Through the song writing workshop, these women have a safe space where their voices resonate with one another. It is such a blessing to be able to work with Robin. She had the fit and the ability to facilitate this workshop. She has the belief that we all have something to say in a song. Putting our stories into music was a wonderful experience, as well as a challenge. And it just made people feel good to do this."

Who exactly is Robin Lane? According to the Robin Lane website (<http://www.random-rogue.com/robinlane/bio.php>) Robin was born in Los Angeles, to a mother that was a professional model (which is obvious as soon as you are close to this beautiful woman), and a father who was a musical director and songwriter for Dean Martin. Robin first entered the LA Folk-Rock scene, and began collaborating with the band Crazy Horse and Danny Whitten. Her next stop was singing with Neil Young on his album 'Everybody Knows This is Nowhere'. Fade out Los Angeles, and fade in



Robin Lane of Chartbusters fame (left) lends a hand with Maria Rodman's Woman's Resource Center in Turners Falls

Cambridge, Massachusetts in the late 1970's. Robin joined with the legendary Chartbusters, and brought an eclectic, powerful mix of Punk, New Wave, East Coast Folk, and West Coast Rock to the collaboration. Three albums were released on Warner Brothers Records. They toured the world, opening for such first class acts as the Kinks, the Cars, Split Enz, Hall & Oates, and XTC, and also headlined shows of their own.

The life of a music star is rewarding but grueling, and the grind of long tours began to take its toll on Robin. She decided to focus more attention on her newborn daughter, and this decision cost Robin and the Chartbusters their record contract. But Robin never regretted the change. She turned to songwriting for other performers, and also performed solo, open-

ing for such artists as Warren Zevon, Taj Mahal, Dave Mason, and John Hiatt. Robin released her first solo album, 'Catbird Seat' in 1995, and has just released a new CD with the reformed Chartbusters entitled 'Piece of Mind'. How kind the Fates are, then, that drew Robin to Greenfield, where she currently resides, and how fortunate the Woman's Resource Center to have Robin as a teacher and role model.

Along with vocals and guitar by Robin, and vocals by some of the women songwriters, the Center is also extremely fortunate to have musician and engineer John Stout (of local psychedelic band 'Elevator Tribe'), Doug Tanner on flute, and Alan Marcus on guitar to accompany the CD. Robin talked about the process involved in the creation

see LANE, pg 15

LANE

continued from pg 13

the other women met for a twelve-week course in song writing, once a week for two hours. The process was a true collaboration, and one of the important benefits was a building of confidence in the songwriters themselves. A woman with a truly beautiful voice had been told many years ago by a music teacher that she couldn't sing. "Can you imagine?" said Robin. "The reality is that everyone has a song in them. I wanted to coax that song out, first through the writing process and then through the singing. The key thing is to have fun and commune. And along the way we realize that we're all not that different."

The evening passes. I look at the warm Oriental rug on the floor, the colorful pictures drawn by children hanging on the wall, the cobalt vase of fresh flowers. A beautiful baby has come to the party, and is busily drinking his bottle on his mother's lap. The women critique the songs as they play. "Maybe that one was mixed a little too low." "It sounds like the drums are flattening it a little." "That's the most awesome song - right out of Porgy and Bess." Robin muses "I don't think we recorded this one hot enough. I have to remember that for the final recording." An afterthought: "Make sure you tell people in the article that the Center is looking for funding." "Hmmm that sounds 'smokier' - You know, like it was recorded in a piano bar". Robin talks a little about the actual process of recording the

CD. She brought a Zoom MRS 1266 with her to the classes (that's a digital recording machine). Mixing was also done at John's studio, Dream Authority Music, in Guilford, Vermont.

Rebecca Lane summed up the feeling in the room: "Robin Lane is an occasion we've risen to. Everybody had these beginnings of ideas, and then Robin just felt the song, and everyone just kind of grew these things together." "That's right," says Robin. "I'm definitely a diva. No seriously, I'll do a song twenty times to get the emotion into it." P. nods and looks at her grandson. "You know, nothing in this world is the right height for a baby except for mama's arms." What are some of Robin's plans for the future? "I'd like to continue doing this kind of thing in this area. You know, get some people, movers and shakers, and create a place where everybody can meet and relax. It would have all sorts of art, all funded, of course... I'd like to do another songwriting class in the fall, release this CD. I've also done a class with teens from Northfield Mount Hermon, and the Learning Exchange in Greenfield." Their CD is called "Giving Youth a Voice", and is available at the tourist center in Greenfield. For more information on Robin, including upcoming shows and a discography, see the Robin Lane website (<http://www.random-rogue.com/robinlane/discog/piece-of-mind.php>) or email binny@mtdata.com. To contact the Woman's Resource Center, call 863-4805.