

Singing in the Key of **Be** Major

Fans and players call it Nashville West—a stretch of Front Range Colorado that’s home to musicians who are defining—and redefining—the sound of America’s “classical” roots music, which spans bluegrass, country, folk and blues.

In each issue of *Be Magazine*, we’ll introduce you to a woman who plays an integral role in Northern Colorado’s music scene. Some of our Stars of Nashville West are players in the literal sense. Others are making music behind-the-scenes, from DJ booths, production offices and concert venues. All are them are writing stories of personal passion in the positively groundbreaking style we’ve nicknamed, the Key of “Be” Major.

Be Mag’s “Women of Nashville West” series kicks off with K.C. Groves, a Lyons-based musician who embodies the “can-do, will-do” side of Front Range creativity. An instrumentalist (mandolin, guitar, bass), singer/songwriter and musical force of nature, K.C. keeps tradition alive while creating new reasons for fans and fellow players to follow her lead—and harmony—of sound and ideas.

BY SHARON GLASSMAN

Born in Michigan to a family that included a yodeling/singing father, K.C. Groves “just said no” to piano lessons as a girl, but was bitten by the Americana music bug in

her teens.

Her Front Range connection is a direct result of her musicianship. K.C.’s first CD, “Can You Hear It?,” was produced by bluegrass legend Charles Sawtelle in Lyons, Colorado.

That trip turned her into a Coloradoan in fact as well as spirit.

“I had been to the RockyGrass festival,” she recalls, “and I remember thinking, ‘I could live in a place like this.’”

Moving to the Front Range wasn’t the same thing as living here at first. Like a lot of Nashville West artists, K.C. was touring a lot. The all-woman, old-time band Uncle Earl, which she’d co-founded with a friend in Michigan, kept her on the road for much of 2004-2007.

But by 2009, K.C. was snowboarding, hiking and camping in Crested Butte. And she was playing in bands whose members were a car-ride, or a foot-path away. All of which spelled happiness.

“I love being closer to home and playing with people who are my neighbors,” she says.

Life on the Front Range is inspiring, K.C. says. And, yes, slightly over-inspiring at times.

“I can’t not think of things to do,” she says, with a smile.

The good news for music fans

is that you can see and hear K.C. around town quite a bit these days.

Bluegrass fans can join her at Oskar Blues in Lyons on Tuesday nights for a free, open pick. Radio fans can tune into Redstone Radio, an Internet project she’s co-founded to promote local musicians. Front Rangers can hear her play live with The John Hartford Review Band, country bar band The Fairlane Club, and The Moody Sisters, an all-female folk group.

Here are some of K.C.’s favorite northern Colorado tunes, gigs and insights:

Her big Aha! moment in terms of American roots music

“...a Norman and Nancy Blake record...I knew by song No. 2 on that record that I had stumbled onto something I was meant to dive straight into and not look back.”

Her favorite Front Range live performance

“RockyGrass. Not only is it one of the premiere bluegrass festivals in the nation, but it’s only a few blocks from my house. It’s really amazing to play that stage under that red cliff by the river and look out and see my fellow Tuesday jammers, friends, neighbors, all out there giving back so much good energy to the local girl on the big stage.”

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PHOTO: JONATHAN DOWDELL

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you also have to eat well and sleep well.”

Sleeping well, unfortunately, has not always been an option during the economic downturn, but Amy has taken careful measures to ensure Boulder Body Wear’s stability. “We are not taking as many risks, and we are keeping our price points in the mid range,” she explains. “I have tightened payroll, renegotiated my lease and reworked my contracts with service and supply. And by switching to energy-efficient lighting, we have cut our energy bill by two-thirds.” She foresees modest gains in the future but it’s still a long road ahead. “The days of retailers buying and dumping goods as part of their business plans are over,” she says. “The new business model relies on efficiency and smart inventory.”

As far as the future, Boulder Body Wear will continue to evolve with its customers. “What it comes down to is that we know our customers really well,” Amy says. “We are funky and different, and we thrive on it. There are no corporate decisions. We are real and we go with our heart.”

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Favorite original songs

“Peach Pie: every time I sing that song I’m transported back to a bluegrass festival in Ohio in the fall.”

“World Turns Around: I wrote this one when I was reading way too much Cormac McCarthy... I dedicated this song to Charles Sawtelle, the producer of my first solo album, who passed away a few days after the album came out.”

Her dream band (a question she answers with a smile)

My Front Range dream-band would be to be magically transported back in time to 1981 and be the fifth member of Hot Rize.

My current dream band would be Chris Elliot on banjo, Sally Truitt on old time banjo and arrangements, Jordan Ramsey on mandolin, Tyler Grant on lead guitar, Eric Thorin on bass, Martin Gilmore writing the songs, playing guitar and singing harmony. Vince Herman would be my main harmony singer and band-leader and the back up singers would be Mollie O’Brien and Helen and Nick Forster.

Smart advice for musicians in the wings

“The fun-est part of being a musician is playing music – and that can happen in a backyard, at a house concert or at a jam. If you can make it your profession, that’s awesome – but don’t forget why you do it in the first place.”



For more on K.C. Groves, visit: <http://kcgroves.com>
To nominate a woman of Nashville West, email us at editorial@BeMagColorado.com

