

STREET SCENE

Once-insecure Jill Jack gets some serious attention



CHRISTINA FUOCO

Last weekend, multi-Detroit Music Award winner Jill Jack was reminded of how deeply insecure she was about her music.

"I've kept journals since I was 9. I was cleaning up some stuff yesterday and I found some from 1985, 1986, 1987. It was so funny how back then I would just touch on my being insecure with myself. I was restless, but I didn't know what I was missing," Jack explained.

"But I thought I would stick to my guns and continue singing even though no one was taking me seriously."

Now Detroit music fans are taking the 35-year-old pop singer/songwriter seriously. In April, Jack won six out of the 10 Detroit Music Awards for which she was nominated.

The year before, she was honored with the Best New Rock Act prize a week after the release of her debut album "Watch Over Me" (Drum Dancer Records).

"My goal is to reach as many people as possible. I get to meet so many different people on so many different levels," said Jack, her words speeding up with excitement.

"I want to see how many people I can move."

On Saturday, Oct. 24, Jack goes for round two as she celebrates the release of her sophomore effort, "Too Close to the Sun," with a party and performance at the Magic Bag in Ferndale.

"Too Close to the Sun" is her second album for Ferndale's Drum Dancer Records, run by her songwriting partner Billy Brandt.

"Billy is an integral part of Jill Jack," she said. "Without Billy, I know there would be no Jill Jack. I can't say what or where I would be without Billy — except that I probably would have got-

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Jill Jack
Singer-songwriter

ten more sleep over the last two years."

Conservative childhood

As far as her mind can reach, Jack remembers singing around home. But music wasn't an obsession like with her partner/guitarist Brandt.

"Billy walked around with a guitar in his hand. I had a bunch of different things going on. I sang and I always pretended in my room. It's so cool, my daughter, she does the same thing. Now she wants a real microphone and I tell her to dream on," she said with a laugh about 7-year-old daughter Emma with husband/musician David Jack.

"Musician" wasn't the first occupation of choice that Jack's parents had for her.

"I came from a real conservative family. My father was a doctor and my mother was a nurse. So you went to college and got a real job," she explained.

Eventually, she dropped out of nursing school to seriously pursue music. Jack made her living working at an accounting firm for \$10 an hour and sang at night backing the likes of Stewart Francke, The Forbes Brothers, and Johnny Allen and the Appeal. ("I was the Appeal, I guess," she said with a laugh.)

"I remember working for free, or for drinks and food. I didn't think I was good enough to get paid. I definitely never did it for money. I did it for the love of it. I was working from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. and then singing at night. It's no different than what I'm doing now because I'm a mom."

she said.

When she reached her late 20s, she felt more comfortable writing and singing her own material and thought about a solo career.

"Everyone told me I should sing solo but nobody wanted to give me any songs. Dave bought me a guitar because I just had an old one. Then I started to work with Billy Brandt. We're like John Loventhal and Shawn Colvin. We have a partnership like that," Jack explained about the team who wrote and sang the Grammy-winning song "Sonny Came Home."

"Billy always shows up at my front door when I'm writing a song. He's the one who will tell me it's OK to put it out there. I needed that approval, somebody to bounce that off of."

She released her first album,

"Watch Over Me," in April 1997 and one week later won several Detroit Music Awards, including Best New Rock Act. It was the ultimate sign of acceptance.

"I thought, Oh my God. Now what am I gonna do? I don't think I've taken it all in. I just pulled out a video of the '97 Music Awards and I looked like a scared baby. It was all new to me," she said of her performance with a host of female Detroit singer/songwriters including Sister Seed and Jan Krist.

"Now it seems like it's been 10 years for all the work we've done."

Jack's work has included opening for Dan Fogelberg, John Mellencamp and Pat Benatar at Meadow Brook Festival and Pine Knob Music Theatres. She's also been a featured artist on several Detroit radio station-sponsored concert bills.

Her latest effort is "Too Close to the Sun," which carries a much more organic feel. In recording the album, she brought along some of Detroit's most well-known musicians — guitarist/producer Michael King, bassists Jay Lambert, Nolan Mendenhall, Gary Rasmussen, and Chris Colovas, drummers Danny Cox and Kerry Gluck-

man, organ player Tim Diaz.

The use of mandolins, Hammond B-3 and Wuritzer organs, and strings, give "Too Close to the Sun" a warm feel. There is a bit of darkness, however.

"This record has a little more sadness to it. This last year was really hard, working all the time. There's some sort of poignancy, I guess, to being unhappy all the time. But I don't want to feel mad and angry."

"If there is one common thread linking the songs on both albums, even the 'darker' songs, it's the underlying sense of hope. I view 'Freedom,' for example, as a really positive song. Even though the music itself has a minor feel to it, it's really about taking those steps, finding the freedom you need in order to achieve your goals."

Not only does her music offer a glimpse of hope, her stage disposition does as well.

"When I come out, I make sure I have a huge smile," she explained.

"Everything I write about is hopeful. If I'm going to write a darker song, there's going to be a side of it where life isn't just over. In an ad, we used the word 'faith' and Billy thought maybe we should take it out. But there's so much of it in my music."

Jill Jack celebrates the release of her second CD "Too Close to the Sun" with a party and performance. Saturday, Oct. 24, at the Magic Bag, 22920 Woodward Ave., Ferndale. Tickets are \$6 for the 18 and older show and are available at all Ticketmaster outlets. Jason Magee and Sun 200 open the show at 9 p.m. and 9:30 p.m., respectively, with Jack to follow at 10:15 p.m. For more information, call (248) 544-3030 or visit <http://www.themagicbag.com>.

For more information about Jill Jack and Drum Dancer Records, write to P.O. Box 20752, Ferndale, Mich., 48220, or visit <http://www.drumdancerrecords.com> or <http://www.jilljack.com>.

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