

SARAH JAROSZ



"Sarah Jarosz could be Gillian Welch's long-lost daughter . . ."

"Widely regarded as one of acoustic music's most promising young talents: a singer-songwriter and mandolin and banjo prodigy with the taste and poise to strike that rare balance of commercial and critical success."

The New York Times

"With a descending circular flourish of acoustic notes, the bluegrass influence on Follow Me Down is evident, but the almost weightlessness suggests something else, something perhaps more. By the time the husky alto voice comes in, inviting us to "Follow me down through the cotton fields/Moon shadow shine by the well/Lead us down a road, where no one goes, we can run away . . .," the bewitchment is complete."



THE AUSTIN CHRONICLE

"Sarah Jarosz in bloom is a thing of beauty. Her sophomore album opens with an invitation to follow her down to the cotton fields and beyond, and we will because Jarosz delivers on the promise of her stunning debut two years ago."



"Beyond precocious, Jarosz (a native of Austin) imbues virtuoso musicianship with an adventurous spirit."

"On wonder-struck ballad 'Edge of a Dream' and throughout debut album Song Up in Her Head, she reveals a gorgeous musicality that's at once precocious and achingly pure."



"One of the fastest-rising stars in the roots music scene, and rapidly crossing over to the mainstream too."



"Austin's newgrass prodigy moves ever onwards – remember that name."





TUESDAY, MAY 17 2011

Sarah Jarosz, *Follow Me Down*

★★★ $\frac{1}{2}$ (out of ★★★★★)

Jarosz's 2009 debut album, *Song Up In Her Head*, marked one of the most exciting discoveries in bluegrass - or any genre - in years. On this follow-up, the singer/songwriter, who turns 20 next Monday, adds bolder textures and more pronounced grooves. But her simple strengths are still at the fore - the pure expressivity with which she sings and plays, and her knack for embracing haunting melodies.

- Elysa Gardner

Download: Run Away, Floating in the Balance





Sarah Jarosz
Follow Me Down
(Sugar Hill)

Rating: ★★★★★

By Jon Stone May 17th, 2011

When multi-instrumentalist Sarah Jarosz's *Song Up in Her Head* was released in the summer of 2009 it was always her age that reviews mentioned first. Eighteen, and fresh out of high school, her youth seemed an impossibility given the confident voice and masterful playing on the record. But it was the songwriting on *Song Up in Her Head* that truly set her apart — and, indeed, that got her nominated for a Grammy for the song “Mansinneedof.” Two years later, and with the release of a beautiful new record *Follow Me Down*, it's time to proceed past the astonishment of Jarosz's remarkable age and acknowledge her place among the prestigious group of musicians currently pursuing acoustic music to exciting and progressive new heights.

To be sure, that elite group has already warmly welcomed her. In addition to having another collection of fantastic folk/grass songs, *Follow Me Down* boasts an impressive guest list: Bela Fleck, Dan Tyminski, Jerry Douglas, Edgar Meyer, and Vince Gill, among others, lend their voices and instrumentation. Their support, however, never overpowers Jarosz's clear and confident place in front of her songs. *Follow Me Down* is the work of an artist who both understands her music's roots but has a clear vision of the potential of those roots' capacity to spread and transform. Like her debut, *Follow Me Down* embraces tradition (“Anabelle Lee”) — especially as that tradition gets reflected in song structure and playing chops (“Old Smitty” and “Here Nor There”) — but isn't afraid to push, modulate, and expand. For example, “Run Away,” the album's haunting lead-off track builds its mood through Jarosz's guitar and banjo work, but also with a well-placed electric guitar. Jarosz's work on the octave mandolin can be heard on the second track, “Come Around,” and it also features a subtle drum track along side Fleck's unmistakable banjo and Darrell Scott's back-up vocal. Harmless enough, but electricity and drums raise eyebrows in traditional bluegrass circles so those choices should be understood as being made in strict service to the song.

Nowhere is Jarosz's respect for songcraft more clear than in her treatment of the album's two cover songs. Chris Thile's Punch Brothers lend their astute instrumentation to Jarosz's stunning rendition of Radiohead's dreamy OK Computer track “The Tourist” making clear that it is not just a singular tradition that interests those of the progressive acoustic fare. (Thile's back-up vocal is lovely here, but listen for both Noam Pikelny and Gabe Witcher's respective banjo and fiddle work. Astounding.) One could make precisely the same argument on the other cover, a take on Dylan's “Ring them Bells”.

As the title suggests, *Follow Me Down* is an invitation. Sarah Jarosz invites us along with her into a growing sonic space of collaboration and artistry at this the second step along what will surely be a long and productive musical journey.



spirit

SOUTHWEST AIRLINES

JUNE 2011



Sarah Jarosz

HOMETOWN: Wimberley, Texas

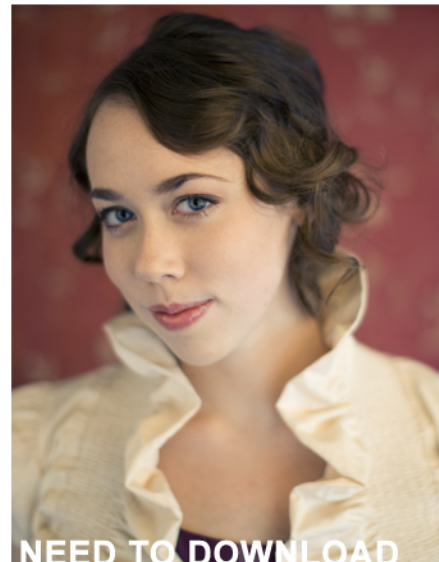
NOTES: Her name rhymes with “the rose” and she’s in full bloom with a second acclaimed album called *Follow Me Down*. Jarosz was buzzed about in her early teens in Texas. Now she’s taken her banjo, mandolin, and songwriting prowess to the New England Conservatory, where the 20-year-old is an undergrad. She’s modernizing traditional music with gentle percussion and humid ambience, while breaking hearts with her startling voice.

Reminds us of: Alison Krauss baptized in an Appalachian stream.

WRITTEN BY CRAIG HAVIGHURST

marieclaire

JULY 2011



NEED TO DOWNLOAD

“Come Around,” **SARAH JAROSZ**. Jarosz smears musical genres like pastel chalk. Jazzy drums and bluegrass instruments (banjo!) create a dizzying landscape for her wounded alto, making this 20-year-old’s ache tough to shake.

SUGAR HILL

The New York Times

May 8, 2011

Singer, Songwriter, Prodigy, All at 19

By ANDY LANGER

A little over two years ago, when Sarah Jarosz was still just 16, Alison Krauss, the acoustic music icon, listened to her demos and politely declined to co-produce her debut record. After explaining that she would be too busy working with Robert Plant, Ms. Krauss sent this message through an intermediary at Ms. Jarosz's label: "Tell her there's three songs there I'd cut right now. She shouldn't let me and should keep them for herself, but I think she's that good."



Even with the words of encouragement, Ms. Krauss's pass might stand as the closest thing to a disappointment in Ms. Jarosz's nascent career.

Like Ms. Krauss, who recorded her first album at 14, Ms. Jarosz is widely regarded as one of acoustic music's most promising young talents: a singer-songwriter and mandolin and banjo prodigy with the taste and poise to strike that rare balance of commercial and critical success.

Her 2009 debut, "Song Up in Her Head," earned her an Americana Music Award nomination, appearances on "Austin City Limits" and "A Prairie Home Companion," and bookings at Bonnaroo, the Newport Folk Festival and the Telluride Bluegrass Festival. She was also nominated for a Grammy in 2009 for Best Country Instrumental Performance, and she received the news in her college dorm room.

"The label texted me, and I had no idea it was even a possibility," said Ms. Jarosz, a Wimberley native who is studying contemporary music improvisation at the New England Conservatory in Boston. "My roommate was there with me. I shrieked a little. And little by little, my classmates came trickling in to help me celebrate."

Ms. Jarosz said her classmates, many of whom also have budding music careers, aren't surprised anymore that she's not around much on weekends. On a recent Thursday, Ms. Jarosz was in class from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. The next day, she took a final exam in her keyboard class and flew to play in North Carolina at MerleFest, which also featured Lyle Lovett and Robert Plant and his Band of Joy. She flew back for Monday classes, working in transit to prepare for the semester's final exams, papers and performances.

In theory, this is Ms. Jarosz's between-album down time. On May 17, six days shy of her 20th birthday, Sugar Hill Records, the venerable bluegrass and Americana label, will start a new promotional push with the release of Ms. Jarosz's sophomore record, "Follow Me Down." Ms. Jarosz wrote all but 2 of the album's 11 tracks, and the credits in the liner notes read like a roll call of the acoustic music world's elite, — Béla Fleck, Jerry Douglas, Shawn Colvin and Darrell Scott. Their contributions had to be recorded around Ms. Jarosz's academic schedule, with Ms. Jarosz flying to Nashville on weekends and holiday breaks.

The New York Times

May 8, 2011

Page 2 of 2

“She has staggering time-management skills,” said Gary Paczosa, Ms. Jarosz’s co-producer and A&R representative at Sugar Hill Records, adding, “When she was 16, you felt like you were around a 22-year-old. And now at 19, you’re with a 33-year-old. You constantly have to remind yourself of her age. I think a lot of it goes back to being an only child and having folks that talk to you like an adult your whole life.”

When Ms. Jarosz was 11, her parents, Gary and Mary Jarosz — who are both teachers — recognized their daughter’s musical interests and began taking her to weekly bluegrass jams in Wimberley, which led to a series of workshops and performance opportunities at folk and bluegrass festivals around the country.

At those festival circuits’ children’s workshops and campfire jams, Ms. Jarosz met many of her heroes, some of the same high-profile musicians she’d eventually invite to contribute to her records, including Chris Thile, the mandolin virtuoso of Nickel Creek. Mr. Thile’s latest band, The Punch Brothers, collaborates with Ms. Jarosz on what’s perhaps the most surprising moment of “Follow Me Down,” a cover of the Radiohead track “The Tourist.” Then again, maybe it will only surprise acoustic and bluegrass purists who miss her first album’s takes on Decemberists and Tom Waits tunes.

“I grew up appreciating musicians that were kind of on the edge, coming from acoustic folk and bluegrass backgrounds, but also pushing the envelope,” said Ms. Jarosz, who has recently begun charting original music for string quartets, something she learned this semester in school and hopes to apply to her next record. “And because of that, I don’t feel tied down to any genre or history. And yet, I think there’s a difference between not worrying about purists and not respecting that history. I came from that world. But you can respect that world and not be tied down to it.”

While she’s comfortable poking at the ceiling a bit, Ms. Jarosz said she’s not in a rush to figure out just how far away she’ll eventually wind up from her bluegrass and acoustic roots. That “Follow Me Down” is sparking those kinds of discussions before its release suggests that maybe that story line will soon supplant the most obvious one: her age.

“I’m still 19, so I’d understand if people still want to talk about my age,” Ms. Jarosz said. “But here’s the thing: Even if nobody was talking about me at all, I’d still be doing this. School’s taught me so much already about how much I don’t know. It’s made me think about music in a different, deeper way. I think I’m still just scratching the surface.”





Sarah Jarosz: *Follow Me Down*

By Holly Gleason | May 17, 2011

With a descending circular flourish of acoustic guitar notes, the bluegrass influence on *Follow Me Down* is evident, but the almost weightlessness suggests something else, something perhaps more. By the time the husky alto voice comes in, inviting us to “Follow me down through the cotton fields/ Moon shadow shine by the well/ Lead us down a road, where no one goes, we can run away...,” the bewitchment is complete.

Sarah Jarosz, now 19, made quite a mark two years ago with *Song Up In Her Head*, but rather than hone the traditional Appalachian discipline, the sensualist singer explores the possibilities of acoustic/roots music — conjuring songscapes, erotic tableau and enough tension to hold listeners transfixed throughout *Follow Me Down*.

Largely self-penned — save for a shimmering rendition of Bon Dylan’s “Ring Them Bells” featuring vocals from Vince Gill and a lean, brooding meander through Radiohead’s minor-keyed gem “The Tourist” with the Punch Brothers, plus a banjo-and-fiddle-strewn haunter based on Edgar Allan Poe’s elegiac poem “Annabel Lee” made all the more haunting by Dan Tyminski’s counterpoint vocals — these songs could serve as a map to the bohemian gypsy heart of a young woman coming into her own. They’re rife with desire, hope, the hunger to see what the world holds, a little uncertainty and always the exultant joy that can be found in the playing.

The percolating rhythms of “Come To Me” — all bursts of cello, banjo notes and down-stroked guitar — move under the songwriter’s sense of unmooring in the vastness and the anchor of another. There is the doubt of how to move through the world and the questioning of the solidity of another answered, as the emergence of self-reliance provides the ultimate liberation.

Again relying on her core players — Alex Hargreaves and Nathaniel Smith — Jarosz expands her songs by enlisting the Punch Brothers, Jerry Douglas, Bela Fleck, Viktor Krauss and Edgar Meyers for an album where the playing is as engaging as the tales she sings. An accomplished musician who moves from clawhammer banjo to Wurlitzer, electric guitar to octave mandolin to — yes — toy piano, what falls from her fingertips is as evocative as the words she offers to explain the world around her.

From Wimberly, Texas, where the countryside rolls endlessly and vastness invites a certain dreaminess, as well as a need to be present, Jarosz has synthesized opposing realities into a textured whole. She matches a reeling instrumental like “Old Smitty” with the classic singer/songwriter stylings of “My Muse,” an etherlike intoxication that draws the listener by the ear, then the heart and finally the brain. Somewhere in between those aesthetics is the folk/Appalachian “Here Nor There,” a dobro-defined examination of elusiveness heightened by Darrell Scott’s back-holler harmonies pressing against her feathery alto.

With so much ground covered without the usual jarring disconnect, Jarosz closes *Follow Me Down* with an instrumental meditation of mandolin, cello, wood flute and violin called “Peace.” A settling coda for the journey, it suggests quiet places to consider all that has been revealed — and offers her fans a sense that the dream has only just begun. With a descending circular flourish of acoustic guitar notes, the bluegrass influence on *Follow Me Down* is evident, but the almost weightlessness suggests something else, something perhaps more. By the time the husky alto voice comes in, inviting us to “Follow me down through the cotton fields/ Moon shadow shine by the well/ Lead us down a road, where no one goes, we can run away...,” the bewitchment is complete.

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GARDEN & GUN

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2011

The New Grass Masters

Twenty acts that are giving old-time Southern music new life
by MATT HENDRICKSON



Sarah Jarosz
Wimberley, Texas



Raised in Wimberley, a Texas Hill Country hamlet, the nineteen-year-old Jarosz grew up around music. At ten, she was getting schooled on mandolin at a local Friday-night bluegrass jam. “My first experience was so supportive,” she says. “Every week, I’d go back and get more encouragement.” By high school, she had performed at RockyGrass in Lyons, Colorado, and been mentored by Mike Marshall, Tim O’Brien, and Chris Thile, whom she met at the Old Settler’s Music Festival in Austin. Appearances on radio’s *A Prairie Home Companion* and at Bonnaroo, Newport,

and at Bonnaroo, Newport, and Telluride led to *Song Up in Her Head*, her 2009 debut, which garnered a Grammy nomination for her original instrumental “Mansinneedof.” Now in her third year at the New England Conservatory, she’s managed to squeeze in time for an appearance on *Austin City Limits* and to write and record her second album—all originals save for two songs. Purists beware; this time around some tracks will have drums. “I’m expanding my horizons,” Jarosz admits. “And I’m having a blast.”

Favorite Southern joint:

Trudy’s Texas Star in Austin

Song you must hear:

Her cover of “Grandma’s Hands” by Bill Withers



TEXAS MUSIC

SUMMER 2011



Sarah Jarosz

The acoustic prodigy is moving beyond her roots — and keeping listeners transfixed. **BY LAURA C. MALLONEE**

IT'S THE DAY after her much-anticipated double show at Austin's One World Theatre, and acoustic music's Next Big Thing is sitting in the back office of Waterloo Records. Sarah Jarosz, who turns 20 today, is wearing studded sandals, jeans and a sleeveless tunic with a Peter Pan collar. Her long brown hair is loose on her shoulders, and behind her warm smile is the relaxed expression of someone too busy to be nervous. In the past month the Wimberley native has barreled through sophomore finals at the New England Conservatory in Boston, released her second album, *Follow Me Down*, on Sugar Hill Records and kicked off a summer tour at New York's Rockwood Music Hall. Despite juggling interviews and sound checks, the former teen insists she wouldn't want to spend her birthday any other way.

Jarosz wrote and co-produced her first record, *Song up in Her Head*, when she was barely 18. With its intelligent instrumentation firmly rooted in the mandolin, claw-hammer banjo and lush vocals, the album snagged three Austin Music Awards, a Grammy and the critics' consensus that Jarosz was a bluegrass prodigy. On *Follow Me Down* (which hit stores May 17), the songstress wanders from her small-town roots into a different realm where electric guitar, drums and toy piano are all welcome. The album has already garnered her an Americana Honors & Awards nomination for Best Instrumentalist of the Year. On Tuesday, Jarosz will hit the road with pals Nathaniel Smith and Alex Hargreaves for a tour across America that will also include dates in Canada, Denmark and the U.K. For now, we're lucky to catch up

with the birthday girl a few minutes before her in-store Waterloo performance.

I bet you don't get much Tex-Mex in New England.

[laughs] Not exactly. I'm filling up on it as much as I can while I'm here.

It took six years to record and release your debut album, but Follow Me Down came together in just two. Was your process different?

I guess you could say I waited six years, but it really feels like I waited my whole life. Music has never been a formulaic thing for me — it's always changing. The fact that you can't say "Here's step 1-2-3" is why I like it. This album was definitely different. It wasn't my first record, and I came into it knowing a bit more. It was similar in the sense that [co-producer] Gary Paczosa and I went about recording it in the same way, starting with just my part and building each track up from there.

It's less rootsy than your debut.

A lot of that comes from the simple fact of being in the studio with lots of different instruments and not being afraid to experiment. Musically, it seemed like a natural progression on to the next thing.

Where does that progression lead?

I can definitely see myself moving out of bluegrass. All the musicians I've respected have never really fit into a genre, even though they may trace back to strong roots. But there's still a general feeling of them going past those roots.

Such as?

Chris Thile is a great example, especially in his band the Punch Brothers, of taking acoustic instruments and really pushing them to a place they've never gone before. My music also starts with an acoustic feel and moves on from there. But I usually like to stay away from the genre thing.

You say you can see yourself moving out of bluegrass. Has school changed you?

I'm not wanting to lose the soul or roots of where it all started for me — that was one of Gary Paczosa's concerns when he found out I was going to the Conservatory. But I felt this way before, and I think I'd feel this way even if I hadn't gone to Boston — the sense of not feeling tied down to anything and just trying whatever. I do think having two years of school has pushed me out of my comfort zone musically.

How so?

I'm learning to use my voice in ways I haven't

before. I've been listening to a lot of music I wasn't listening to before. More jazz. A lot of what my classmates are doing is also really inspiring.

How does that play out on Follow Me Down?

"Peace" is an example. I wrote the song's A and B section when I was 12, played it for a while and then forgot about it. When I was working on this record, I played it for Hankus Netsky, my main teacher at school, and he really liked it. The next day he found me and said, "Sarah, I think you have an A section and a C section, and you need to write a B section." That was just before Christmas break, so I went home and messed around with it and wound up writing a B section. I had it in mind to also arrange it for the bass, violin and wood flute — that's how it is on the album.

Do you have a favorite song on the record?

It would have to be a split between "Come Around" and "My Muse." Those are such personal songs to me, and I never get tired of singing them.

I really enjoy your rendition of "The Tourist." What made you choose to cover Radiohead?

Radiohead ties back to the Punch Brothers. A few years ago I was backstage at a music festival jamming with Chris Thile, and he started playing that song. I loved it, so I went home and learned it. Later Chris invited me to sing it with them a couple times at their live shows. When I was thinking of some covers that would be cool for the album, it came to mind. Radiohead can be so many configurations of themselves.

Thile plays on your album, as do musical greats like Viktor Krauss, Béla Fleck, Jerry Douglas, Dan Tyminski and Shawn Colvin. What's that like?

That's the cool thing about growing up in this acoustic community. As long as I can remember — being a young girl and attending music festivals — everyone was so generous with their time. All of these heroes I grew up listening to were always accessible and willing to pass on their knowledge. That's a unique and special thing.

What are you listening to now?

I'm always looking for something new. I've been a Beck fan for a long time, but never had the album *Sea Change*. I just downloaded it because I found out Nigel Godrich, who produces for Radiohead, engineered that album as well. I think Nat [Smith] actually just bought it on vinyl.

It's not your typical Beck.

It's not Beck at all! [laughs]

You're accomplished for your age. Do you ever feel disconnected from your peers?

I don't. Living in Boston has been a big part of that — not only at school, but also in the music scene in general. There are so many amazing musicians my age wanting to do this — people who are so hungry for it and original in what they're doing. It makes it impossible to feel disconnected. But obviously there are times when I feel the double-life thing, with school and gigs.

So how do you stay true to yourself?

I feel so lucky to have grown up in Wimberley with its close proximity to Austin. There's such a strong sense of identity with the place for any musician who's spent a lot of time in this area. I guess the important thing is to surround myself with people I love making music with and to listen to the music I grew up listening to — little reminders here and there of why I started doing this in the first place. If I ever get stressed out with school or start to forget why I'm doing this, going to music festivals in the summer and being in that sort of community makes me remember, "OK — this is why." X



September 2009

BELLES OF BLUEGRASS

New albums from talented upstarts—plus one grande dame—find fresh inspiration in a classic American style. **BY SCOTT FRAMPTON**



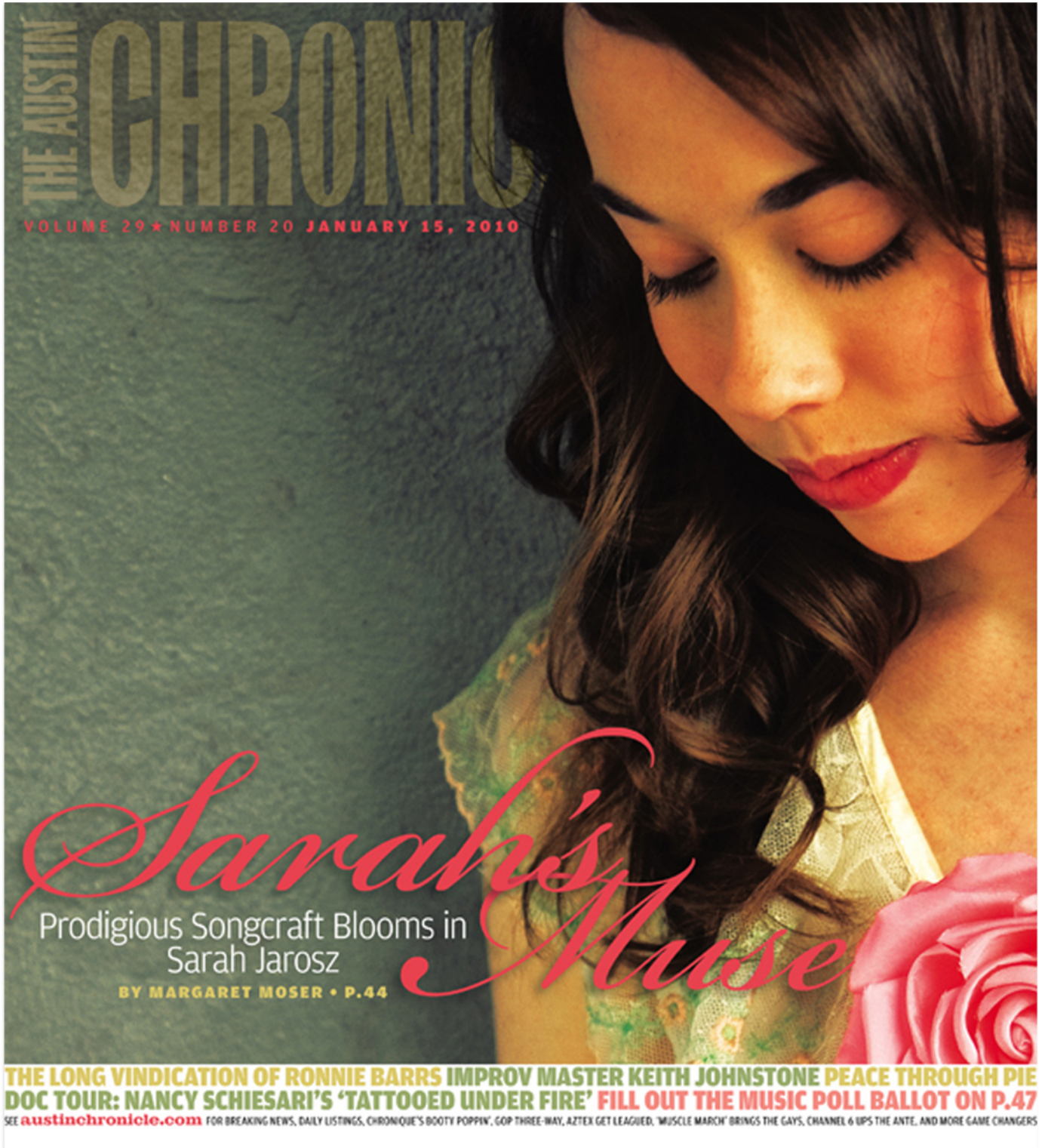
THE WHIZ KID:

SARAH JAROSZ

She's an accomplished mandolin picker who wrote one of the nakedly emotional ballads on **Song Up in Her Head** (Sugar Hill) when she was 14—all of four years ago. Beyond precocious, Jarosz (a native of Austin) imbues virtuoso musicianship with an adventurous spirit: Her debut brackets classic bluegrass instrumentals with covers of Tom Waits and indie rock stars the Decemberists.

■ **DOWNLOAD THIS:**
"Come On Up
to the House"







Sarah's Muse

Up in the head and heart of Sarah Jarosz

BY MARGARET MOSER

In June 2009, one month after Sarah Jarosz turned 18 and graduated with honors from Wimberley High School, her first album was released. *Song Up in Her Head* on North Carolina roots beacon Sugar Hill Records took off, not only in the sales market, where it did respectably, but in critical circles. *Rolling Stone* praised it. NPR interviewed her, and she appeared on *A Prairie Home Companion*, as well as on stages in the bluegrass and folk festivals she'd grown up with. On New Year's Day 2010, while the world slept, she recorded with the Decemberists spin-off Black Prairie.

Jarosz stands apart from her peers. She's not Miley Cyrus Twittering her life away. She's not Taylor Swift, around whom she can sing circles. She's not Jewel or Hilary Duff or Shannon Curfman, all of whom preceded her down the teen path. She's not the 14-year-old who giggled to the *Chronicle* in 2005 that things were "a blast." She doesn't use Auto-Tune.

She's the product of Central Texas' rich musical heritage and her own inborn talent. She is also the face of young musicians everywhere. Her triple threat is a marvelously mature alto, a prodigious mastery of clawhammer banjo and mandolin, and songwriting a woman of any age would be proud to claim. Later this month, she'll attend the Grammy Awards thanks to her nomination for Best Country Instrumental Performance on *Song Up in Her Head*.

'Song Up in Her Head'

Teenage girls are the romance paperbacks of music. They're a never-ending, nonstop audience of hormonal angst and bright-pink heartache, an audience that starts when 12 trades up for 13, a merciless time for the heart. To be 14 and female is to experience usually unrequited love with exquisite pain. Never again will you be so unprepared for the soul-crush of love lost than at 15. Even love fulfilled makes 16 pure agony, and 17's got nothing on 18 when it comes to the hazards of love. Nineteen makes no promises when *el corazón* goes loco.

Teenage girls make up a ridiculously large and profitable segment of the record-buying public, but they — like the romance authors whose sales keep the paperback publishing industry afloat — get no respect. Not only is the absence of respect outrageous considering the revenue that demographic generates, teenage girls are traditionally jeered at and ridiculed for their intense devotion and fan worship, a quality usually desired in most other musical circles.

Teenage girls hold their own as performers in rock, pop, country, and folk music, commanding idol status commensurate to the tides of popular taste. Charts are packed with one-hit wonders as well as enduring talents who were teenage performers; country and pop music are especially fond of young girl singers. The voice of the teenage girl is so pure, so real, it transcends artifice and strikes the deepest chords

of the heart throughout decades. Jarosz bears career similarities to 1980s pop queen Debbie Gibson, the youngest teen girl to write, produce, and sing a No. 1 song. She's also connected by home state to LeAnn Rimes and Tanya Tucker. Texas teens whose talents took them to the top — on compositional skills giving an edge to their estimable careers. What do they all sing about? The one topic common to all young women.

New love, old love, faded love, unrequited love, sweet love, denied love, misguided love, tender love, lost love, unattainable love, hot love, desperate, wild, bittersweet love. All of it guaranteed at that age to be fleeting, acute, and lethal. Where all is love, the world is periphery in soft focus, an Impressionist painting with growing pains. The glorious cycle of song, the medley extemporaneous, begets dances at dawn, waltzes under the moon, springtime, flowers, rainbows, and oh yes, sometimes sobering cultural commentary.

Jarosz tackles the topic of love in her songs with guileless grace.

*This flame burns brighter with every poem read
This bird flies higher with a song up in her head*

Sarah, have you been in love?
"Yes."

Sincerely, Sarah

About eight years ago, Jarosz's career took shape, though she'd been singing since age 2. Conventional wisdom decrees that an artist must toil in clubs, climbing the long way to the top from opening act to headliner, developing an audience along the way by wowing 'em with that elusive combination of charisma and talent. But the folk and bluegrass festival circuit offers an alternative for young musicians to develop that trickles down into the community. That familial closeness brought Jarosz, winner of the 2006-2007 Best Kid Band award at the Austin Music Awards, onstage during the 2005 CMA Music Festival to salute Earl Scruggs and during New Year's Eve 2008 at Ryman Auditorium with Del McCoury.

At home for Christmas break before returning to the East Coast, she's the picture of collegiate confidence, recounting her accelerating career while sitting inside Nutty Brown Cafe near Dripping Springs and north of her native Wimberley. Clad in jeans and high-heeled boots, a black scarf wrapped around her neck with Boston flair over a cream-colored blouse that flatters her fair skin and ripe lips, Jarosz reflects the late December sky outside in her large blue-gray eyes. Whatever adolescent awkwardness she experienced, growing up agrees with her.

"I really started at the weekly bluegrass jams in Wimberley on Fridays," she explains. "Mike Bond was the ringleader, and to have one of my first experiences playing like that be so welcoming meant a lot to me. And going to festivals around the country. [Colorado's] RockyGrass is a great example. It's put on by Planet Bluegrass, who does Telluride. Being a young musician and a young girl, it was extremely important to be around people who encouraged me. I've been going there for nine years of my life, and it's like a family reunion.

"I was 11 or 12 when I got my first 'tweener' [minisets between major acts] at RockyGrass. I am so lucky that people like Craig Ferguson, who runs Telluride and RockyGrass, and Stephen Ruffo, who does Wintergrass, were willing to let me play.

Old Settler's [Music Festival] too was a huge part of my growth as a musician. It opened a lot of doors that opened more doors. Little things like that built up."

Built up meant beginning a tightrope act of school, lessons, practices, performances, and, somewhere wedged between, a young girl's life. For that, Jarosz credits her parents, Gary and Mary Jarosz, who intellectually stimulated and musically cultivated her nascent career.

"They are not stage parents. They've been amazing, so encouraging, and really made it

The voice of the teenage girl is so pure, so real, it transcends artifice and strikes the deepest chords of the heart throughout decades.

possible for me to travel around the country and do so many of these things in music.

"They are both teachers. My mom plays guitar and has written songs. My dad is not a musician, but he loves music probably more than anything. He's one of those guys who can't walk into Waterloo Records without walking out with 10 new CDs."

Crucial in her development as a performer is the caliber of musicians she's met along the way. Some, like Sam Grisman, are second-generation players, carrying tradition in their young blood. Others, their names high in the bluegrass and folk fields, like Tim O'Brien, Jerry Douglas, Abigail Washburn, Stuart Duncan, and Darrell Scott, also lent their talents to *Song Up in Her Head*, as did Alex Hargreaves, Luke Reynolds, Mike Marshall, Ben Sollee, and Tim Lauer.

"I've stood in autograph lines in festivals," says Jarosz. "That was how I met [Nickel Creek's] Chris Thile. I had just started mandolin. It was at the Old Settler's Music Festival at Stone Mountain in Dripping Springs. I was 9 or 10, and he wrote on my program, 'Let's jam sometime.' At that moment, I knew I wanted to be good enough, and since then, he's become one of my greatest mentors."

"I also met the Decemberists like that, at [Austin City Limits Music Festival]. There's a new band called Black Prairie that's three of the Decemberists. On New Year's Day, I'm going up to Portland, Oregon, where Sugar Hill Records is doing a Shel Silverstein tribute. I'm doing a track on the record with them for it. That'll be the start of the new year. Spend the night with my family, then fly out."

Collecting Ideas

"I have been patient in the CD-making process," Jarosz nods.

"Growing up as a young musician, I always had people ask me, 'When are you going to make a CD?' so there was definitely a little pressure. But I always knew I wanted my first CD to be the best representation of my art

and music as possible. I also knew I wanted the majority of it to be original songs. So, having been patient, I'd developed a lot of ideas in my head I wanted to include on the CD. That, with [producer] Gary Paczosa's mastery of things and his having done it for so long paired with my newness to it all, was a great match."

That innate understanding of the music-making process is a benefit that Austin's sophisticated scene provides to young musicians, and it's turning their coming-of-age into arrival on the scene (see "Bluegrass Up in Her Head," April 17, 2009). In that sense, Jarosz is in a league parallel to the likes of Suzanna Choffel, born and raised in Austin and a product of a scene that made her recognize how "you could play and get your stuff



out there and don't have to be a crazy-big pop star" (see "The Next Fun Fearless Female Rock Star," Nov. 28, 2008).

The making of *Song Up in Her Head* with her self-composed Grammy-nominated instrumental track "Mansinneedof" also provided Jarosz with lessons reflected in her everyday life. Wimberley isn't Austin, and not even in the same county, but its relative proximity feeds off and shares its energy, particularly encouraging to the composing dynamic.

"Songwriting is a different process every time. It's ever-changing, and I think one reason I like it so much is it's never predictable. Sometimes it just comes, and those are the real gems and gifts when it just kind of happens. Recently, I've tried to sit down and just work at it, but I think that just having things come are how it works. I feel like I try too hard to explain it and it's an indescribable art. For me, it's about being a good listener and not being closed off to the world."

"Writing ideas down, recording a little melody idea, coming back to it and piecing things together, that's how I've been working. Balancing school and work, it's hard to find time to write. Music is constant learning. I have a couple of notebooks, documents on my computer, notes on my phone The ones on my computer

"I've stood in autograph lines in festivals," says Jarosz. "That was how I met [Nickel Creek's] Chris Thile. I had just started mandolin. It was at the Old Settler's Music Festival at Stone Mountain in Dripping Springs. I was 9 or 10, and he wrote on my program, 'Let's jam sometime.'"

were probably when I was writing a paper," admits Jarosz, who confesses she wrote many of the lyrics for her CD during high school classes.

Years on the festival circuit and her musical background exposed Jarosz to songwriters traditionally cited – Bob Dylan, Paul Simon, a recently developed interest in Joni Mitchell – as well as younger, more contemporary players and writers such as Gillian Welch and Dave Rawlings, for whom she flew back here to play a two-night stand at the Parish in December

before whisking herself back to the New England Conservatory in Boston and completing finals. "Collecting ideas" is a phrase that crops up repeatedly in conversation, an indicator of her awareness of her circumstances.

"Since I was always surrounded by musicians and people excited about music, it helped me have an open mind – and listen to as much as possible and be influenced by everything. Notice what's good and what's bad and take what you can from it. It's getting harder and harder to be original. Find what you like, and make it your own."

Sarah's Smile

The smile on Sarah Jarosz's pretty face is irresistible as she considers the success of *Song Up in Her Head* (see "Texas Platters," June 12, 2009), and more so, 2010, eager to work with producer Gary Paczosa again, a summer festival dance card filling up with Telluride and Grey Fox, and an imminent trip to the Grammys. She's aware that eyes are upon her, too, yet her confidence is casual and filled with curiosity.

"Now I feel like because I've done it once, I'll do things a little quicker. Maybe not though. It's always fun to be in a studio for hours and fool around creatively. I feel like I accomplished a lot I wanted to recording the first CD, so I feel like I'm open to newer things, too – no boundaries. I want to be true to myself. I even have a new song called 'My Muse.' It's about someone in particular who's been inspirational, but the idea of the muse is that it's different for everyone. That's why it's so cool."

"The last couple of interviews I've had have started going in a new direction. The questions are not so much about where I grew up but are turning to the future. It's good for me because it makes me think and analyze what's really important. I think a lot of that has to do with the fact that I'm not a little girl anymore."

"I'm only 18. The more I live, the more I'll have to write about." ■

Behind 'Broussard's Lament'

*They told us Thursday they would come,
They told us Friday they would come,
Saturday came and still the dying lived on*

It's one of the most striking tunes on Sarah Jarosz's *Song Up in Her Head*, "Broussard's Lament," one that leaves the topic of love far behind the questions of governmental culpability and human dignity.

"I was 14 when Hurricane Katrina happened, and it was one of those songs that came very quickly in the aftermath of all that," explains its author, Jarosz. "I saw an interview on TV with this man named Broussard, and he was telling the story of a woman during the flooding. They kept telling her, 'Thursday, the buses will come tomorrow; Friday they will come; Saturday they will come.' And he cried as he's telling it."

"I thought, 'That needs to be a song.'"

"Those things are so real and human, it's really touched me as a young person. A lot of my songs are personal and about love, so it was nice to write about something else."

The story of Aaron Broussard wasn't simply a sound bite. It earned him national notoriety, a Wikipedia entry, and even anti-Broussard sites (www.aaronbroussard.info). The president of New Orleans' neighboring Jefferson Parish, Broussard made an emotional appearance on MSNBC's *Meet the Press* just after Katrina in 2005 that caught national attention when he broke down describing the death of a colleague's mother, drowned in a nursing home that was not evacuated (www.youtube.com/watch?v=09dJJAEVZ4g).

Broussard, it turned out, may have helped create chaos in Jefferson Parish when the levees broke, because, according to Wikipedia, "he followed a years-old 'doomsday plan' in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and evacuated more than 200

drainage pump operators north to Washington Parish. The pumps remained off for more than two days and sections of the parish, including Metairie and Kenner, experienced severe flooding as a result." Furthermore, although his colleague's mother did drown in her nursing home, it appears to have happened as much by operator neglect. Broussard kept his position as parish president and remains a controversial figure in Louisiana politics.

It's sobering to juxtapose the tawdry reality of Broussard's appearance with the bleak reality of what happened when the levees broke in New Orleans. Yet within the murky blur of truth under the glare of the media amid unquestionably disastrous conditions, Broussard's lament, no matter how grandstanding or specious, spoke of a terrible truth echoed timelessly in the folk tradition in Jarosz's song.

For most, the buses never came.

– M.M.

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SARAH JAROSZ

The rising star and multi-instrumentalist discusses guitars, octave mandolins, and her expansive and adventurous sophomore album.

BY KENNY BERKOWITZ • Photos by Anne Hamersky

At the age of 18, bluegrass multi-instrumentalist Sarah Jarosz couldn't have dreamed of the response to her debut, 2009's *Song Up in Her Head*. She was invited to play Austin City Limits and *A Prairie Home Companion*, nominated for a Grammy, and hailed as a prodigy in both the music and mainstream press. Since then, she's moved from Texas to Massachusetts, finished her sophomore year at the New England Conservatory, and released *Follow Me Down*, an album that's even more adventurous, wide-ranging, and complex than the first.

"Recording this second album was an amazing process and a great learning experience," says Jarosz, talking from her home in Boston. "Having worked together before, [producer] Gary Paczosa and I started this album with an understanding of how each of us likes to work and a vision of pushing the music farther than we did the first time. Over the last two years, there have been a ton of new musical influences and life experiences coming my way, and they've really affected the things I want to do musically and lyrically."

You can hear it immediately on "Run Away," the album's opening cut, where Jarosz plays electric guitar

to establish a sense of restlessness, sings with a new maturity in her voice, and darkens the spaces between notes with a fingerpicking pattern on acoustic guitar, an underlying rhythm on six-string banjo, and an occasional accent from toy piano. It's there on the instrumental "Old Smitty," where she trades leads on octave mandolin with Alex Hargreaves (violin) and Jerry Douglas (dobro), beginning at full speed before stuttering to a halt, then starting again in a mix of moods from frantic to elegiac, jagged to otherworldly. And it's never clearer than on the slow, ghostly cover of Radiohead's "The Tourist," a collaboration with the Punch Brothers, which reaches beyond the boundaries of bluegrass, blurring the lines between singer-songwriter folk, old-time, country, and new acoustic music.

She's not the same musician she was at 18. "School has been so amazing in the way it's taken me out of my comfort zone," says Jarosz, who is majoring in contemporary improvisation. "My classmates are basically all over the place, pushing the envelope as far as it can possibly go, which has been really inspiring to be around. I've been listening in-depth to a lot of music I never really listened to earlier, and it's given me a much bigger picture than ever before."

Sitting In

Growing up as the daughter of two school-teachers in Wimberley, Texas, about 45 miles south of Austin, Jarosz began taking piano lessons at six. At ten, inspired by a Hot Rize recording of “Colleen Malone,” she switched her focus to mandolin, fell in love with bluegrass and old-time, and became a regular at Wimberley’s Friday night acoustic jam sessions.

For the first few weeks, she sat outside the circle, not knowing what to expect. Over time, she started taking breaks, and before long, she was bringing in tunes each week to play with the group. Two years later, Jarosz met her idol Chris Thile, who suggested they jam. Inspired, she began composing mandolin instrumentals, including “Peace,” the newgrass air that closes *Follow Me Down*, and the earliest fragments of what would become *Song Up in Her Head*.

After taking up clawhammer banjo and guitar the following year, she began evolving into a songwriter, creating pieces to perform on her own, developing her voice, and filling notebooks with lyrics. (“I’ve found my wings and I’m ready to fly,” wrote the 13-year-old Jarosz in *Song Up in Her Head*’s “Left Home,” which she considers her first real song. “Some things in life are better left unknown / Or there would be no wonder, no why / But as I travel through this world / I want to give all those things a try.”)

“I think the transition came from having listened to so many songwriters in my life,” Jarosz says. “My dad is a huge musical collector, and my mom has always been a songwriter, so she was really encouraging. I’d see her writing songs and think, ‘That’s something I can do.’ At the beginning, the melodies would just come to me, and I didn’t really put much thought into it. It was more like, ‘Oh, I just made up that little melody.’ That’s how the process started, especially when I had just started playing mandolin. Then, little by little, I added words.”

By the time she started high school, Jarosz had already performed with the Austin Symphony Orchestra, Earl Scruggs, and Ricky Skaggs. After playing the Telluride Bluegrass Festival in 2007, Jarosz agreed to work with Paczosa (known for his work with Alison Krauss and Thile). Over the next year and a half, she wrote songs, recorded tracks in Nashville, and graduated from high school (and also applied for college, choosing NEC over Berklee College of Music). Jarosz released *Song Up in Her Head* to wide acclaim as an 18-year-old bluegrass phenom, with a Grammy nomination for the Tony Rice–inspired “Mansinneedof.”

“I’ve always been patient,” says Jarosz, who’d been encouraged to record when she was just 12 years old, “and I wanted my first

CD to be the best representation of my art. I didn’t feel a need to rush anything, and I didn’t want it to feel forced, because I knew I would only keep growing more and more as a musician.”

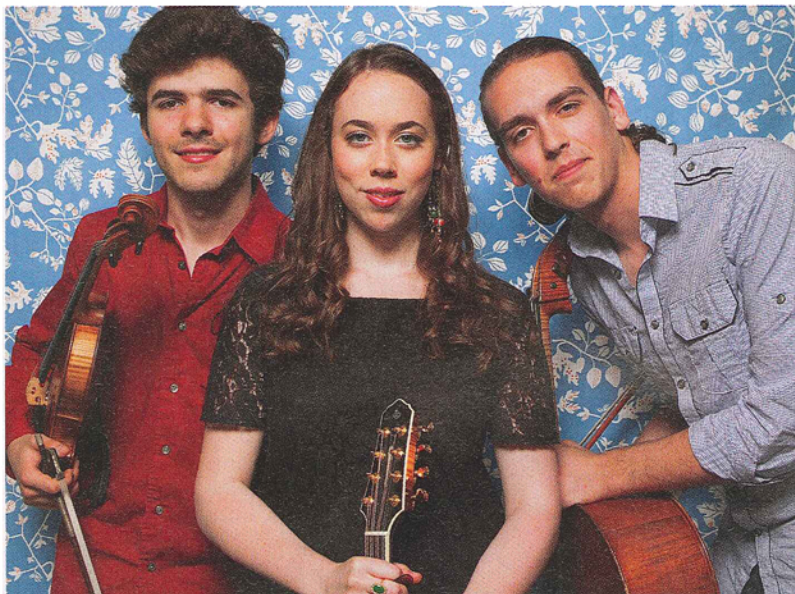
Growing Up

Two years later, much of her daily life has remained the same. Jarosz still practices every day, keeps a notebook (and phone) to capture song ideas, and works around the clock to balance academics and music. But even more has changed: For the first time, she’s living on her own, far from home and family, and adjusting to life and winter a thousand miles away from Texas. Like her classmates, she’s focusing on music nearly full-time, but unlike most of them, she’s already established a professional career, with two highly-acclaimed albums, an appearance this spring with Alison Krauss and Jerry Douglas on the BBC’s *Transatlantic*

with jazz singer and composer Dominique Eade, who’s played with Bill Frisell and Fred Hersch, and violinist/vocalist Carla Kihlstedt, a member of acoustic collective Tin Hat, which has helped her become a more confident, adventurous improviser.

“I’ve been dabbling in a little bit of everything, which is why this program has been so great for me,” Jarosz says. “Doing things I’d never done before, like playing jazz standards or Yiddish folk songs, has totally challenged me musically, and two years into it, I feel I’ve already learned a lot. I’m not necessarily going to become a jazz musician, but all these experiences are becoming an important part of my musical language.”

The new songs don’t sound like Texas, and though most of the shifts are fairly subtle—she’s too self-assured to change dramatically—the differences are pronounced. Clawhammer banjo, which was one of the



From left: Alex Hargreaves, Sarah Jarosz, and Nathaniel Smith.

Sessions, and a summer filled with performances across the United States, Canada, and Europe.

It’s a lot to ask of a 20 year old, even one as talented as Jarosz, who’s clearly enjoying the work. She’s very pleased with her decision to attend NEC, where she’s working closely with Hankus Netsky, who chairs the contemporary improvisation department and is also the founder and director of the Klezmer Conservatory Band. In the past two years, she’s played in a Jewish music ensemble, a jazz ensemble, and a world music ensemble—opportunities she would never have had if she’d stayed in Wimberley or skipped college for a full-time musical career. She’s studied

most striking parts of *Song Up in Her Head*, appears only once on *Follow Me Down*, in a haunted, Anglo-Irish treatment of Edgar Allan Poe’s “Annabelle Lee” that’s a world away from old-time. Octave mandolin, which Jarosz began playing toward the end of the *Song Up in Her Head* sessions, has become her main vehicle for songs, providing the barest, gentlest support on Bob Dylan’s “Ring Them Bells,” the chiming arpeggios of “My Muse,” and the driving, percussive punch of “Come Around,” which features Béla Fleck.

She’s growing up, and her writing is, too. As a lyricist, her concerns are shifting toward the urban present, whether she’s writing about a chance encounter on the New York

subway (“Gypsy”), the search for love (“Here Nor There”), or the limbo that comes while waiting for the next stage of life to arrive (“Floating in the Balance”). Without ever sounding academic, the melodies are more complex, the rhythms more unpredictable, the chord choices more surprising; and instead of relying on songs to appear, as she did for much of *Song Up in Her Head*, she’s seeking them out.

“I’ve learned a lot from Hankus, who leads a songwriting workshop,” Jarosz says. “Each time I’ve done it, there have been about ten students in the class, and it’s a really cool opportunity to work on new songs, play them for the group, and hear feedback on how to make them better. The most beneficial part has been getting new ideas for arrangements and having people push me to think about the songs in a bigger way. I’m learning how to see a new song in every way I possibly can, thinking more outside the box, and discovering how one new motif can make a song open up in a totally different way than when I was just playing it for myself.”

Searching for an instrumental to close *Follow Me Down*, Jarosz came to Netsky with “Peace.” “It was getting toward the end of the recording process and I was preparing to go to Nashville for the last two weeks of recording

this CD,” she says. “I played what I had of the instrumental, an A part and a B part, and Hankus really liked it. The next day after our lesson, he found me in the hall and said, ‘I

‘The thing I love about songwriting is that it’s always a new experience. There’s no list of rules saying, ‘Do step one, step two, step three and you’ll have a song.’ There are different ways of writing it, which makes it a very introspective, spiritual experience.’

was thinking about that little instrumental you played for me, and I decided you have an A and a C section, but you need to write the B section.’ So while I was at home in Texas over Christmas break, I wrote the B part, and that’s the instrumental that went on the album. To me, that’s a really good example of something I started a long time ago being affected by school.”

Transformed, the tune is a small gem, a concise, loving exploration of an old idea with

a newer, deeper understanding. It starts at the lower end of the mandolin’s range, gently ascending and descending in a semi-classical style that recalls Irish harpist Turlough O’Carolan, then gracefully resolves into a major chord three minutes later. But without that middle section and the dramatic tension of Stuart Duncan (fiddle), Seamus Egan (wooden flute), and Edgar Meyer (arco bass) playing Jarosz’s contemporary countermelodies in and out of synchrony, dancing around her mandolin lines, the resolution would be nowhere near as powerful.

Jarosz writes slowly, carefully, deliberately. It took two years to write the nine original songs on this album, which was recorded over weekends and school breaks, and in the last four years of writing, she’s finished few songs that haven’t yet been released. “For me, songwriting feels like a new experience each time,” Jarosz says. “Last summer, for the first time, I did some co-writing with Alyssa Bonagura [on “Run Away”] and Cameron Scoggins [on “Annabelle Lee”]. The thing I love about songwriting is that it’s always a new experience. There’s no list of rules saying, ‘Do step one, step two, step three, and you’ll have a song.’ There are different ways of writing it, which makes it a very introspective, spiritual experience, and that’s what I love about it.”

If Jarosz needs inspiration, she’ll listen to her favorite songwriters, like Bob Dylan, Tim O’Brien, Darrell Scott, Gillian Welch, or Paul Simon, whose “Kathy’s Song” kept running through her head during a trip to England and Scotland. Invited by Transatlantic Sessions’ musical directors Jerry Douglas and Aly Bain, Jarosz performed three songs from *Follow Me Down*—“Annabelle Lee,” “Ring Them Bells,” and “Run Away”—before joining the house band of Russ Barenberg, Dónal Lunny, Mike McGoldrick, and Danny Thompson to back up Alison Krauss. “It was an awesome week, one of the most inspiring in my life,” Jarosz says. “The vibe of the place is almost indescribable. It’s just one of those things where you have to be there to really absorb the energy.”

It was Jarosz’s first visit to Scotland, and the trip included some quiet time, which she



used to begin a couple of new songs in her hotel room. She’s also worked up a guitar arrangement of “Kathy’s Song” and started a tour with Alex Hargreaves (fiddle) and Nathaniel Smith (cello) that will take them as close to home as Austin’s One World Theatre and as far away as Denmark’s Tønder Festival. In the fall she’ll be back in Boston to begin her junior year, when she’ll have the time she needs to finish some new work.

“I’m always jotting down lines and fragments of lines, which I can do anywhere and everywhere,” Jarosz says. “But when it comes to finishing a song, I need quiet time to process all those ideas. For me, it’s about being alone, trying to be honest with myself, and staying as true as I can to my music.” **AC**

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OLD SOUL, NEW SOUND

SUGAR HILL

The anti-Gagas: A new tribe of young female artists is going back to basics

They come from the same generation as Lady Gaga – but the young female artists on the following pages certainly don't share her love for outlandish showmanship. *simmy richman* meets the sisters doing it for posterity

Sarah Jarosz

A mandolin and banjo wunderkind, Jarosz, 20, emerged through the bluegrass music community and has since been nominated for a Grammy. She is currently studying music at the New England Conservatory, has just released her second album and tours the UK in July

"I grew up in Wimberley, which is a small town close to Austin, Texas, and I was lucky because my parents are both teachers and they would regularly take me to concerts where I'd hear all kinds of music. But I really started getting bitten by the bug when I heard Nickel Creek, who are sort of my generation, and a bluegrass band called Hot Rize, whose mandolin player was Tim O'Brien. I discovered them both at the same time and through them I started tracing that music back to what had come before. I love artists who have the rootsy background but are prepared to push the envelope.

"I can't even remember the first time I heard Gillian Welch but she was certainly a major influence. Like her, I want to be able to play anything I want in the future. Purists always want to preserve the marrow of the style but the people I've always respected haven't been afraid of change. Studying music in school is giving me the tools to bring all my musical ideas to life. I'm studying everything from Messiaen to Miles Davis to klezmer.

"These days we all have so much technology and entertainment in our faces. There's a constant wave of craziness and it seems to me that people are just craving for something honest and true that takes you back to a time when things weren't like this. I may be a young person, but even I can see what's real and what's not."



JOSH ANDERSON

Sarah Jarosz: 'I'm studying everything from Messiaen to Miles Davis'