

RyLee's life has turned around

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Tragedy helped fuel heartfelt new album



Singer-songwriter RyLee Madison relaxes at a friend's home in Halifax during a recent visit. The Lower Sackville country singer has just released a powerful album, *Where Does The Time Go*, after enduring personal tragedy. (MARK GOUDGE)

WHERE DOES the Time Go is the title of RyLee Madison's latest album.

It's a question the Lower Sackville country singer has been asking herself.

Five years ago, she released her last album, the ECMA-nominated *Me & Cinderella*.

Since then, Madison went through the breakup of a long-term relationship and a difficult separation from stepchildren she'd raised for more than a decade.

She had married in whirlwind fashion after a friendship turned to love, moved to Nashville and lost her beloved grand-mother, Leah Boutilier, whom she describes as her best friend. Through the pain and turmoil, Madison kept writing songs. She also fell in love with Nashville musician Clay Krasner.

The two were married in 2007.

The experiences — including missing the ocean — helped her create an album filled with haunting melodies, heartfelt lyrics and gorgeous vocals.

Madison was home for a recent visit that included a house concert, appearances at radio stations and opening for Terri Clark at Casino Nova Scotia, backed by Krasner, on bass.

The radiant redhead says she had been concentrating on songwriting after moving to Nashville and didn't think she wanted to do another record. Her debut album, *The Life of RyLee*, was released in 2003, followed by a Christmas album in 2004.

Krasner, who formerly played for Chely Wright, had other ideas.

"Early in the spring of 2008, my husband said I needed to do another album and that he'd been banking songs I'd done," she says over tea and cookies at a Halifax coffee shop. "He drug me into it, and he and I produced it together."

Krasner plays on the album, which also features guitarists Shayne Hill, who has played with Sawyer Brown and Scott Bernard (Kenny Loggins), drummer Steve Brewster (Faith Hill) and keyboardist Charlie Judge (Keith Urban), as well as David Huff on the duet *Plenty of Angels*.

Krasner was responsible for the inclusion of one of the album's most poignant and popular tunes — over Madison's intense objections.

"I fired him four times," she laughs.

December Leave Me Alone is her personal story.

"It was about my first Christmas away from the kids (Dylan and Jordan, now 18, and Erika, now 20) and it was very therapeutic to write. Lennie Gallant said he had goosebumps listening to it. But it was a power ballad, which was something I didn't think I could do. And I didn't want my story told."

But Krasner persisted and now it's one of Madison's favourite tunes on the album, because of the reaction she gets from listeners.

"One woman told me she'd lost her husband three or four years before and the song spoke to her of what she went through without him. . . . The fact that it touches people is a very strong thing.

"I played it at a house concert. . . . I sang it with my eyes closed and half the room was flooded with tears. It was a moment I'll never forget, pure raw emotion."

Madison says living in Nashville is completely inspiring.

“There’s a camaraderie amongst fellow songwriters and musicians and you feel embraced. Everyone you meet, waiters, bartenders, are aspiring songwriters. But it’s not as competitive as you’d think, everyone is cheering you on. Everyone is working side by side.

“Here (in Nova Scotia), people look at you like you’re a dreamer and wonder when you’ll get a real job.”

Madison is in good Bluenose company in Nashville. Gordie Sampson and Jimmy Rankin now make the Tennessee music capital their home and Gallant is often in the city, while Ian Sherwood and Ryan Cook have visited for songwriting sessions.

Missing Nova Scotia is what inspired Salt in the Air.

“It’s my first Celtic-flavoured song and it’s about what I remember as a kid.

Things like smiles being free at McDo-nald’s; Peggys Cove, Mahone Bay and Eastern Passage, places I visited, and Andre Haines, a painter from Martins River I discovered in 2004 and fell in love with his work.

“It’s about the smell of the sea, how I could smell the ocean, feel the moisture in the air. I love the landscape and the peo-ple.”

Salt in the Air also features Pictou Country troubadour Dave Gunning and Antigonish pianist Troy MacGillivray for a true taste of home.

The title track, Where Does the Time Go, had already been recorded by the time her grandmother died in March 2010, but Madison rewrote the song as a dedication to her.

The very last picture taken of her grand-mother appears on the album cover, tucked over Madison’s left shoulder — placed there amid a collection of clocks, including one from an antique store own-ed by the photographer.

“The project was a series of magical moments,” Madison says.

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