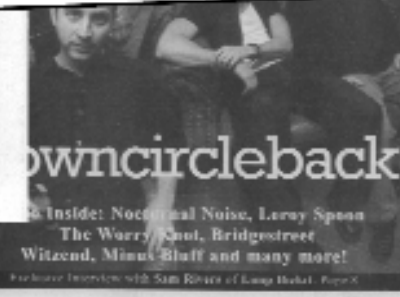


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The Heart of Saturday Night on the pub scene with Mythica by Katie C. Gray

If you believe in an afterlife, and the existence of hell, then you'll believe me when I tell you there's a special place in it reserved for loud drunks who ruin live shows. They'll all be there in about the 8th circle: the ring of ex-sorority honeys who've just conquered a round of kamikazes; the bored weight-shifters in line for the loo swapping inanities with strangers; the clever fellas who shout requests for "Freebird", a song many of them have never heard and wouldn't recognize if the band deigned to play it. I'm all for the combo of booze and music-- the two have a long and storied past together, and goodness knows the one has girded me well for weathering poor examples of the other. But there is nothing so disheartening as watching a decent band swim against the current of a Saturday night in Drexel Hill, where the idle gather for one purpose and one purpose only. And that purpose ain't to listen to Celtic fusion.

Of course, the band Mythica plays a less Eire-y arrangement in person than on their self-released EP, *Dangerous Little Monster*. In the din of friendly Irish everypub Maggie O'Neill's, the harmonic subtleties of this Newark, DE quintet were-- not drowned, but certainly condensed into accessible folk-pop. Sure, the lead singer/guitarist also fronts on mandolin; sure, a giant hammered dulcimer looms amidst the staple equipment of a modern rock outfit. But anyone in attendance expecting a Blarney Stone-kissin', leprechaun-leapin', Rose of Tralee-pluckin' jigfest might walk away disappointed.

Then again, any such hopeful is clearly unfamiliar with Mythica's canon. With a sound owing as much to Sarah McLaughlin as Loreena McKennitt, Mythica was originally formed around the solo efforts of feisty frontwoman Melissa Cox. Described by her bandmates as "a real dynamo", Cox spun her open-mic presence while attending the University of Delaware into a trio featuring childhood friend Nicole Gallagher on flute & backup vocals and boyfriend Matt Smith on bass. After realizing that "In Delaware, if you don't have a [full] band it's really tough to get gigs", they added a percussion section in drummer Curt Gibson (later replaced by Adam Baumol of Citro).

When the group began drawing repeated comparisons to McKennitt and the Cranberries, Cox & Co. decided to run with it, holding an open call for Celtic specialists. The search yielded Erin Flynn (keyboards, violin, hammered dulcimer, and pretty much any traditional Irish instrument you throw her way), a music ed major at UD and veteran of Irish festivals since her high school days. Flynn adds much of the auld country flavor to Mythica's song roster, and it's clear during the live show just how comfortable she is in her element. Standing in the fore at a keyboard as

big as she is, she chats amiably with people in the first row between--heck, during--numbers.

Her calm is shared by Smith, in accordance with the International Bassist Code of Zen, Article 1 (stipulation: pulse during performance shall never exceed 80 at any given time, see also Article XI, exceptions: Flea), and new sticks man Baumol kicks an even-tempered groove that belies his newcomer status; as of the Oct. 7 show, he'd been with the band for about a month. Gallagher maintains an eerie serenity throughout the performance, eyes resting gently closed as though sending her performance to a misty moor in Galway. But Cox is unflaggingly present, cutting through crowd noise with a workman's mezzo-soprano: gutsier than first it seems, less fragile than first it sounds.

The dulcimer stayed largely unused during the band's first set, Flynn opting instead for keys or strings. High points included the infectiously arpeggiated "Dive"; the 1st-set finale "Don't Be", whose lyrics lend *Monster* its title, and which features some truly lovely fiddlin' from Flynn; and "My Magdalene", a driving piece with easily the band's most provocative hook. The Gallagher-coauthored "Rewind" showed the strong influence of Tori Amos circa *Under the Pink*, and 'Candy Love' demonstrated bluesy promise, but the strongest crowd reaction came (of course) at the cover: a no-comment rendition of McLaughlin's 'Building a Mystery'. One girl--the single loudest entry in the 'Who can shriek the loudest before a round of shooters' contest at the bar just moments before--slurred afterwards, "Theyrrrrr so good!!"

And that's what makes me crazy. They are good. And they're gaining momentum; they recently opened for the Spin Doctors and Sister Hazel in Wilmington; they're enjoying regular radio play on WSTW; they've been regulars at the Dewey Beach Music Conference four years running. Piece by piece, they're conquering the Delaware scene

And in a more focused environment, their attempts to cash in on their listeners' boozy spirit might pay off more handsomely than they did that uneventful October night. Before beginning "Tolkien's Fever", a jaunty number with a bluegrass intro, Cox proclaimed cheerfully: "This next one is a drinking song!" She smiled as she said it, but her follow-up--"Since you're so interested in it..."--spoke volumes.

Afterward, as Mythica exited their corner, the dj helpfully filled the void with that delicate ditty, "My Humps".

Just another Saturday night.