SARAH HARMER: LOOKING BACK AND STEPPING UP

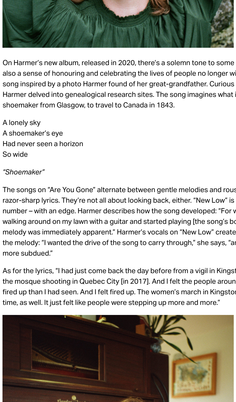
By Andrea Gunn

Nominee, 2021 JUNO Award, Adult Alternative Album of the Year for "Are You Gone"

Sarah Harmer didn't set out for her new album "Are You Gone" to be the spiritual successor of her debut album "You Were Here," released 21 years ago. But, she says, they turned out to be "bookends" for each other, as each album has songs that explore lives lost. On "You Were Here," the title track was an ode to Harmer's friend and former bandmate, Joe Chithalen, who had died in 1999.

I'm just sad for myself
Cause I know you're clear
But I would love it if you were here

"You Were Here"



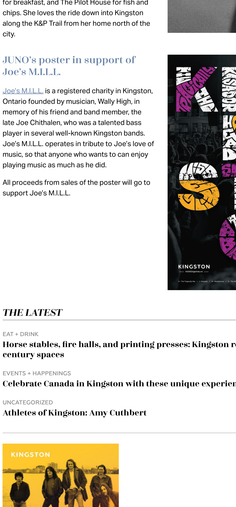
On Harmer's new album, released in 2020, there's a solemn tone to some of the songs, but there is also a sense of honouring and celebrating the lives of people no longer with us. "Shoemaker" is a song inspired by a photo Harmer found of her great-grandfather. Curious about who he had been, Harmer delved into genealogical research sites. The song imagines what it was like for John, a shoemaker from Glasgow, to travel to Canada in 1843.

A lonely sky
A shoemaker's eye
Had never seen a horizon
So wide

"Shoemaker"

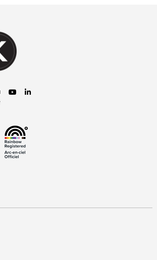
The songs on "Are You Gone" alternate between gentle melodies and rousing ones, and all feature razor-sharp lyrics. They're not all about looking back, either. "New Low" is an energetic, danceable number – with an edge. Harmer describes how the song developed: "For whatever reason, I was walking around on my lawn with a guitar and started playing [the song's bouncy hook] and the melody was immediately apparent," Harmer's vocals on "New Low" create a deliberate contrast to the melody: "I wanted the drive of the song to carry through," she says, "and the vocals to be a little more subdued."

As for the lyrics, "I had just come back the day before from a vigil in Kingston at Market Square after the mosque shooting in Quebec City [in 2017]. And I felt the people around me there were more fired up than I had seen. And I felt fired up. The women's march in Kingston happened around that time, as well. It just felt like people were stepping up more and more."



Out on the streets three times this week
New threats, new lows
If this gets us to our feet and grows
Who knows?

"New Low"



Sarah Harmer's album "Are You Gone" is one of five nominees for the 2021 JUNO Award for Alternative Adult Album of the Year. She previously won this award for her 2005 album "All of Our Names." The JUNO Awards will be broadcast on Sunday, June 6 at 8pm on all CBC platforms: CBCmusic.ca/junos

Some of Sarah Harmer's favourite Kingston spots are Peter's Restaurant on Princess Street for breakfast, and The Pilot House for fish and chips. She loves the ride down into Kingston along the K&P Trail from her home north of the city.

JUNO's poster in support of Joe's M.I.L.L.

Joe's M.I.L.L. is a registered charity in Kingston, Ontario founded by musician, Wally High, in memory of his friend and band member, the late Joe Chithalen, who was a talented bass player in several well-known Kingston bands. Joe's M.I.L.L. operates in tribute to Joe's love of music, so that anyone who wants to can enjoy playing music as much as he did.

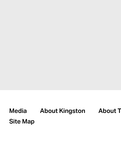
All proceeds from sales of the poster will go to support Joe's M.I.L.L.

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