

Arts and Entertainment

Recording Artist, Samantha Skripko, Surpasses Rock Standards with *Punjab*

By MICHELLE H. LePOIDEVIN
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

ROSELLE — The likes of Melissa Etheridge, Paula Cole, and Aerosmith have rocked the music world to its core as renowned graduates of Berklee College of Music. But fellow alum and recording artist, Samantha Skripko, has been creating her own quakes since the age of four.



The cover of Samantha Skripko's latest CD release, *Punjab*

Gritty morsels of overlapping harmonies and rhyme fuse with ethereal and tender lullabies in the 1998 release of her band's CD, *Punjab*, which was recorded at Sphinx Studios in Boston.

Samantha met fellow band members Masashi "Mashi" Nakamura, lead guitarist, and her husband, Antonio Gandia, electric bass player, while refining her talent at Berklee. Responsible for more than just vocals, Samantha mans the rhythm guitar and keyboards.

"Circus Child," the first of eight tracks, was submitted to the John Lennon Songwriting Contest. One of 50 finalists, surpassing thousands of other entries, this syrupy and seductive tune captured critics' attention with an Honorable Mention.

According to Roselle resident Samantha, she was inspired to write "Circus Child" by a person in her past who was "careless in their personal life." She has also been motivated to create other songs based on past relationships and experiences.

The song cleverly drifts away for a millisecond before returning with the line, "Circus child on the tightrope of lust, can't decide which way to fall." The verse forces you to think as the song takes its final bow, pulling you backwards before you are lured into the next track.

Drawing some inspiration from the poem "Lady Lazarus" by Sylvia Plath (1932-1963), the next track severs the soul with razor blade lyrics, raspy vocals and a sobbing cello (compliments of Liz Buchal). This is one of the most impressive tracks on *Punjab*.

Taking a poetry class at Berklee because she believed the genre was similar to penning song lyrics, Samantha, who was held in awe by Plath's poem, later sat solitary upon the stage of a darkened performance hall at Berklee and wrote *Punjab*'s "Lady Lazarus."

"It was haunting," she recalled during an interview with *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times* while discuss-

ing the poet's tragic life. The despair of Plath's life story is reflected eloquently in this piece.

Samantha, who taught herself how to play the guitar and the piano, has performed in bands since the age of 17, taking the stage at benefits for the Muscular Dystrophy Association, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and disabled persons. She has participated in talent contests since she was four years old.

"Falling From Grace," the third track, bends the ear of the broken hearted with sullen lyrics with a lullaby lilt. Beyond thought provoking, this track offers a soft beginning reminiscent of "Going to California" by Led Zepelin and grabs a hidden part of the heart and won't let go.

Punjab doesn't offer a simple string of notable ballads, but blazes through with edgy rock found in songs like "Carolyn" and "Roadhouse." Punctuated by the perfect balance of guitar and the dropping of a tambourine, these songs display

strength, sass, and brazen attitude. "You" also features some unique harmonizing reminiscent of the Carpenters, with a slight hint of the style of Tori Amos.

The success and technique of both Janis Joplin and Melissa Etheridge have driven Samantha through the years. She cited Joplin's wallflower past in school, which later blossomed into self-confidence, as well as Etheridge's surpassing the small-town image of Kansas City to top the charts after Berklee.

Samantha's songwriting talent, which is evident throughout *Punjab*, has come from an approach known as stream of consciousness, in which she just lets thoughts and ideas flow into her and the pen doesn't leave the paper until she has spilled out every emotion.

To this end, she has been named a two-time winner of the Berklee College of Music Songwriters Contest.

Collegiate radio stations such as WFDU at Fairleigh Dickinson University, WMCX at Monmouth University, WRSU at Rutgers State University and WTSR at Trenton State University have been piping pieces of *Punjab* over their airwaves since its release.

Images Nightclub in Fairview will clear the stage for Samantha and her band on Saturday, July 10, at 8 p.m. and Sunday, July 11, at 9 p.m.

Jazz Festivals to Be Held In Downtown Westfield

WESTFIELD — The 3rd Annual "Sweet Sounds Downtown" jazz performances will be held in downtown Westfield on Tuesdays, July 6, 13 and 20, from 7 to 9 p.m.

The festivals are sponsored by the Downtown Westfield Corporation (DWC) and the Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce.

"We are excited about having the musicians return this year to entertain shoppers and diners in downtown Westfield," said Debbie Schmidt, Chamber Executive Director.

On July 6, Terraplane Blues will perform on Central Avenue near Bombay. Bradford Hayes will play on the corner of Quimby and Elm Streets. New Jersey Workshop for the Arts will set up their 12-piece band on the corner of Elm and

East Broad Streets at the First Union Bank.

The Tom Cohen Trio will be located on East Broad Street near The Leader Store and The Tom Butts Quartet will perform on the corner of East Broad Street and Central Avenue by Gap Kids.

"People should plan to have dinner at one of Westfield's fine restaurants, many offering outdoor dining at their sidewalk cafes, and bring folding chairs if they would like to sit and enjoy the music," stated Michael La Place, DWC Executive Director.

"Having music playing throughout the downtown creates a welcoming ambiance for everyone," he added.

For further information, please call the Chamber of Commerce at (908) 233-3021, or the DWC at (908) 789-9444.



THE SWEET SOUNDS OF JAZZ...The 3rd Annual "Sweet Sounds Downtown" jazz performances will be held in downtown Westfield on Tuesdays, July 6, 13 and 20, from 7 to 9 p.m. Jennifer Wright, with Terraplane Blues, will perform on July 6 on Central Avenue.

Village Green Concerts To Begin This Evening

SCOTCH PLAINS — The Scotch Plains Cultural Arts Committee will kick off their Village Green Series with a concert by Captain Hawkers & The All Stars this evening, Thursday, July 1, at 7:30 p.m. on the Village Green in Scotch Plains.

The 13-piece band recreates the sights and sounds of the 1950s and 1960s through their music and choreography. Performing for 25 years as a band, the group is based in North Plainfield.

A classic car show will also be held. Free birch beer will be provided. The concert is free and open to the public.

The rainsite will be the auditorium of Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School. For more information, please call the Recreation Office at (908) 322-6700.

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Cellist, Orchestra, Set to Perform At Rutgers SummerFest

NEW BRUNSWICK — The Rutgers Art Center in New Brunswick has announced its roster of performers that will appear in the coming week as part of Rutgers SummerFest 1999. The following performances will be held at 8 p.m. in the Nicholas Music Center at Rutgers.

• Saturday, July 3 — Rutgers Festival Orchestra will take the stage with compositions from Gershwin, Still and Bernstein. Admission is \$24.

• Tuesday, July 6 — The Petrarch Ensemble will perform with music from Beethoven and Fauré. Admission is \$18.

• Wednesday, July 7 — Cellist Allison Eldredge will appear with pianist Yoshie Akimoto. The recital will include compositions by Francouer, Debussy, Shostakovich and Chopin. Admission is \$18.

For ticket information, please call (732) 932-7511.



Independence Day Blues Jam Prepared For Fourth of July

PLAINFIELD — Union County's Independence Day Blues Jam will be held on Sunday, July 4, from 2 to 7 p.m. at Cedar Brook Park in Plainfield. Admission is free. The public is welcome to attend.

Robert Junior Lockwood and the Big Band, Carl Weathersby, the Funky Black Widow Band, Joe Taino and the Blue Flame and Blunt Force will take the stage at the event.

Area restaurants will also spon-

sor booths highlighting their best cuisine.

The festival will be presented by the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders. Comcast, the United Way of Union County and Wyndham Garden Hotel will sponsor the event.

"What better way to spend the Fourth of July than to enjoy the blues, a music born and bred in the USA?" said Nicholas P. Scutari, Chairman of the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders.

ARTIST OF THE WEEK Georgia O'Keefe

1887-1986

American abstract painter, Georgia Totto O'Keefe, received worldwide admiration for her still-life masterpieces that detailed elaborate, vibrant and life-like flowers and landscapes with Southwestern themes.

Born in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin in 1887 on a dairy farm, she pursued her love for art at the Art Institute of Chicago. While teaching art in Texas, she met and married American photographer, Alfred Stieglitz.

The couple moved to New York, but O'Keefe journeyed to New Mexico each year to paint the Southwestern desert. When Alfred died in 1946, she moved to New Mexico.

A life of travel and painting



"Oriental Poppies" (1927) was one of Georgia O'Keefe's most noted masterpieces.

ensued for 25 years. The 1970's was a high point for O'Keefe as art lovers absorbed her work and admired her style.

However, in 1972, O'Keefe ceased painting when her eyesight began to fail. She died on March 6, 1986. She was 98 years old.



STATE HONORS...Twenty-two Westfield Public School students were chosen to perform in the 1999 New Jersey Honors Choir. Pictured, left to right, representing Roosevelt Intermediate School, are: Emily Warren, Christina Cordeiro, Elizabeth Trimble and Chelsea Carson.

Students Represent Westfield In New Jersey Honors Choir

WESTFIELD — A group of 22 elementary and intermediate school students represented Westfield Public Schools in the 1999 New Jersey

Honors Choir. The students were accepted after auditioning with approximately 350 students throughout the state.

Those Honor Choir members selected from Westfield included: **Elementary Members: (Grades K-6)**

Julia Nelson and Allison Siko — Franklin Elementary School.

Lisa Chen, Matteo Guasconi and Caitlin Jennings — Wilson Elementary School.

Kyler Boyd, Patrick Daurio, Benjamin Holt and Alyson Tieman — Tamaques Elementary School.

Kyle Fleming, Bryan Callahan and Rachel Smith — McKinley Elementary School.

Stephen Markowski, Diana Spiridigliozzi and Kayla Vandervort — Washington Elementary School.

Chelsea Carlson, Christina Cordeiro and Lizzie Trimble — Roosevelt Intermediate School.

Intermediate Members: (Grades 7 and 8)

Zanatee Hou, Chris Lynn and Jennie Zegan — Edison Intermediate School.

Emily Warren — Roosevelt Intermediate School.

The New Jersey Honors Choir is sponsored by the American Choral Directors Association and the Music Educators National Conference.

Linda King, Supervisor of Fine Arts for the Westfield Public Schools, congratulated the students and their teachers for their dedication to music.

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