

New Release from Patti Casey: The Heart of a Waiting Boy

by K.C. Whiteley

Imagine walking in the woods with your faithful dog beside you on a warm fall afternoon – the river running beside you sparkling in the sunlight. Imagine you are inspired to write a song or poem as you walk. Imagine tapping into a flowing pool of creativity that gives you words to put to music. Now imagine you are Patti Casey, and as you walk by the stream you are struck by the intimate way in which the earth holds the river. The words to a song begin coming to you as they often do while you're walking. The song becomes "You Are the River," a love song from the land to the river, on your just released fifth album, *The Heart of a Waiting Boy*:

I am the land, you are the river
No deeper in love could two ever be
The curve of my banks, the splash of
your tears
One without the other, and neither
could be

The sun on my skin and the breeze
on my bones
And you wandering through me over
sand, over stones
For a hundred, a thousand, forever to
come
I carried you here, and I will carry you
home

Her fifth album in a distinctly home-grown Vermont career spanning two decades, Casey's lyrics and melodies have achieved a height borne of tireless work and ever-blossoming musical talent. Her melodies are memorable and lyrical, the songs and stories they tell have deepened with life's experiences. On this album Casey's writing skills hone in on the essence of the tale to be told. "My writing has matured as I have," says Casey. "It was a lot more personal when I was younger. It's more crafted now. As I'm getting older I'm trying more and more to winnow out the unnecessary words, really get down to absolute bare bones. How much can I convey with those few words? A lot of the creativity I'm reaching for is wordless."

Anyone listening to Casey for the first time will be struck by the clarity and simplicity of both lyrics and vocals. Each note sung is indispensable, and Casey's rich, full voice enters the ear with precision; no frills and nothing wasted. The result is a seamless wedding of music and message that confirms Casey's status as one of Vermont's most important song-

writer/musicians.

Describing her creative process, Casey reflects on the songwriting "event" as first an idea that becomes a lyric, which then "will lend itself to a melody. And then I have a jumping off point from there so the idea and the music are closely intertwined. It's almost like you enter a different brain wave function. Then I come back out of that sort of dreamy brain function and edit it with more of a critical eye. Sometimes I'm not sure what a song is about when I start writing it; it's a funny process. It's really not mine, my song." She is convinced that this pool of creativity is available to all of us if we're willing and able to open up to it. If you're lucky, you'll end up with a really good song at the end of the process.

Casey is known for her high standards and professionalism in the music world. A testament to her status and collaborative spirit are the scores of musicians who are eager to play with her. *The Heart of a Waiting Boy* boasts a line-up unrivaled in Vermont's traditional music scene. Tom MacKenzie, Colin McCaffrey, Gordon Stone, Jeremiah McLane and Pete Sutherland add their best to this

set of tunes, all of them Casey originals with the exception of a lively medley of Quebecois traditionals that features Casey clogging and playing flute. Seeing her perform this is worth the price of a live show.

Other reviewers have remarked on Casey's ability to hold her own in all male bands, which, again, speaks to her superior musicianship and collaborative temperament. When Rusty Jacobs, longtime member of the Woods Tea Co.'s died suddenly of a heart attack in 2007, the band "soldiered on" and kept their bookings with the help and support of several musicians, one of whom was Patti Casey. So impressed were the band members with Casey's versatility and quick pick up of the band's repertoire, they asked her to join them as a permanent member after only a week.

Casey's knowledge of traditional styles and her exceptional musical talent have also brought both a flair and a softness to the Bluegrass Gospel Project's long running success. After seven years as a founding member, lead vocalist and instrumentalist, Casey knew it was time to move on to something new. Within three months Woods Tea Co. had offered her

She's Got the Beat –



Patti Casey

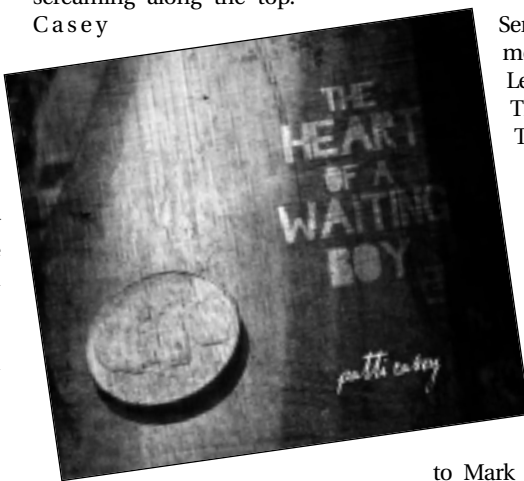
photo: Peter Nielsen

“My writing has matured as I have.”

fulltime work.

Casey acknowledges that *The Heart of a Waiting Boy* is more spiritual than previous albums, and talks about the primary thread that runs through her life. "To be truthful, at any given moment to sift through the stuff I might say in haste or anger and get to what's true underneath that. It's usually a much quieter emotion than what's screaming along the top."

Casey



describes writing a murder ballad, putting herself into that place, and finding the truth for that person in that experience, imagining how she would feel about it. "It's like acting. You're still yourself but you're in that experience and you can speak from that place. That's one of the reasons I like to write story songs. It allows me to have other experiences without actually killing someone!"

At the other end of the direct expe-

rience continuum, Casey talks about the inspiration she found listening to a sermon given by Susan Cooke-Kittredge who was the minister at the Old Meeting House Church in East Montpelier. Cooke-Kittredge's sermon entitled "Send Me Away Empty" prompted Casey to write "Prayer" for the album, which she describes as "a string of prayer beads."

Send me away empty, hollow
me out
Let my yearning be a highway
That leads me to you
That leads me to you

Other recent venues for Casey's talents include her tenure as musical director of the Vermont Stage Company's production of *Woody Guthrie's American Song*. Despite her aversion to being in charge of anything, Casey rose to this challenge, in large part due to Mark Nash's encouragement and support. She credits him as "one of the most generous hearted people on the planet." Her hard work, charting scores for cast members and leading a

theatrical production, paid off and she was asked to return to direct the 2008 production of *Winter Tales*.

Casey says her biggest challenges now that she is a full time member of Woods Tea Co. are finding ways to perform her own music. She does a lot of touring, which she loves, but which has the downside of being away from her partner and ten year old son. A balance of touring and performing her own material is her goal for the near future. Casey would also love it if "someone really big and famous" would record one or two of her songs. This would help get her work more widely known. "Ideally I'd love to just write and record."

With *The Heart of a Waiting Boy* just released, this may be Casey's shot at reaching her dreams. Meanwhile, she will keep on writing beautiful, funny and truthful songs about life in this time and place with a few murder ballads thrown in for good measure.

Pick up a copy and get out to hear Patti Casey with any of her musical band mates or solo if you're lucky.

K.C. Whiteley lives in Montpelier. □



photo: Darin Volpe

Patti Casey's career has spanned two decades; she has a brand new CD to sing for audiences.

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