

A Conversation with . . .

By LARISSA THOMPSON

There were three words that Gregory Douglass kept mentioning during my conversation with him: random, ironic, and paradox. After hearing about how Gregory spent his childhood listening to his mentors and teaching himself how to play the guitar, play piano and sing, those words correlate with the journey this musician has taken so far.

Coming from rural Vermont, it is interesting how much Gregory has taken charge of his life to pursue a musical career, despite how he claims to have felt different than many of his friends growing up. Gregory explained how what seemed to be a negative childhood experience could actually be seen as positive because it forced him to have an obsession with music.

What has resulted from this obsession is Gregory's second album, *Gregory Douglass*. Gregory's album is beyond his 20 years.

On this album you can hear Gregory pushing his voice to the limit; it is both beautiful and astounding. Gregory confides that he finds his singing and vocal harmonies to be his strongest gift; the songs on this album show the confidence this young artist has in his voice. Whatever emotion he is trying to convey is easily heard in the intensity of his singing. On most tracks there are no moments where Gregory is not humming along with the music. This makes each song even more striking because his voice is so entrancing.

In tracks such as "Color Me Perfect" and "Lovely Ruthie," (an amazing piece with the piano), Gregory gives us a glimpse at his piano skills and how his passion for music also thrives at the keys. When asked if he minds being labeled a male Tori Amos, he said it pleased him because he felt that people had recognized his zone of music, where he was coming from, and that it was important to make that connection. He said that if people didn't draw that connection, it would worry him. Tori Amos, Kate Bush, and most recently David Gray, have been his teachers, and it is only natural to him that their sounds are reflected in his music.

Most of the pieces on Gregory's newest album are performed on the

acoustic guitar, with accompaniment from a studio band. According to him, he likes to have an equal split between his solo work and produced pieces. On tour, Gregory tries to splice his performances between those alone and with the band. Gregory admits that he is an extreme person who gets "bored without diversity." In the future he sees himself performing with several female vocalists and a bass player.

Besides greater aspirations with fellow musicians, Gregory's own talents are limitless. He wants his next challenge to be to learn the violin because of his strong affection for orchestra music used by some of his mentors. With a new digital piano, Gregory also wants to master the piano for more of his pieces.

The support from the Burlington community, his family, *Seven Days* and the Point, has been tremendous, Gregory said. He looks forward to placing his feet over the borders of Vermont though. Gregory said he hadn't really collaborated with the Burlington music scene, and he admits that he does not want to get too comfortable in Burlington even though there are plenty of venues to perform at. In the United States, where pop singers like Britney Spears rule the charts, he fears that he might not have the opportunity to shine as much as he would in other places.

America is so random and unpredictable when it comes to music, he said. If it is bubble gum that America wants, then they are missing out on the talent and rich sound of Gregory Douglass, who is only going to get better.

"There is a wave of energy around us at all times and there is one specific channel artists tap into...you just have to tap into it." Gregory considers himself to be an observer, which is very apparent in two of the songs on *Gregory Douglass*, "Lovely Ruthie" and "Virginia." Gregory said that he likes to pick specific situations and elaborate on them. He said, "I like to give my views on the situation, sort of as my theories on the way life works." As a listener, I felt that we could all relate to being an observer in life and that is what Gregory captures so elo-

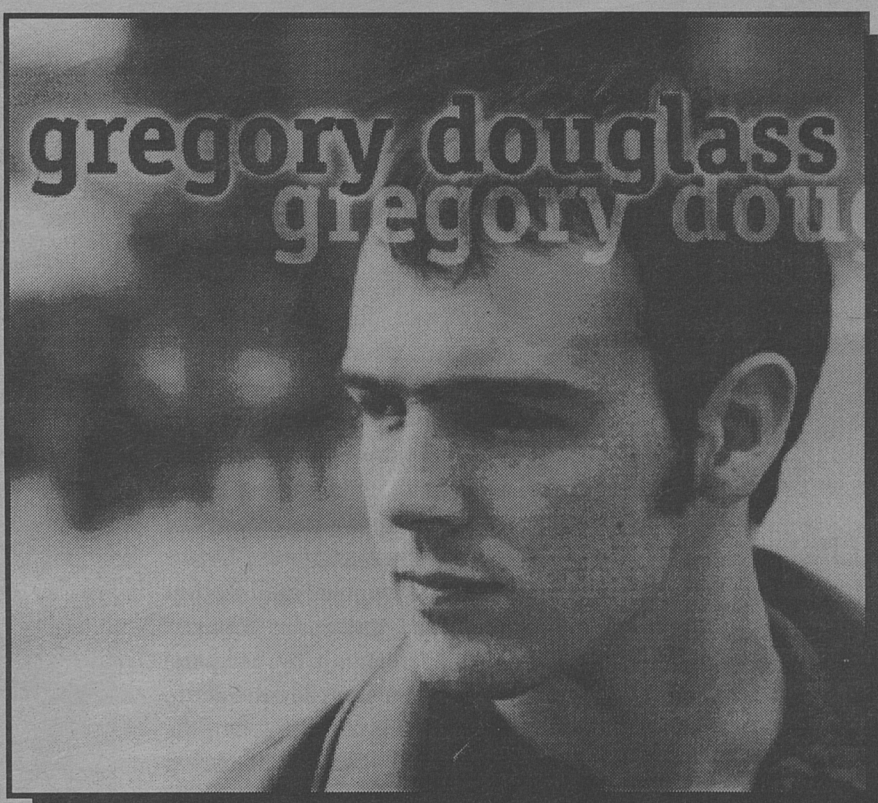
quently in his songwriting. Although he admits that his weakness is sometimes with finding the lyrics, the listener cannot tell as Gregory captures the story about a friend who struggles with his inner-woman in "Lovely Ruthie", or sings about the dominant, independent women in his life in "Virginia." The songs are not just melodies as much as they are stories by a young person, growing up, watching the world, and putting what he sees into music; something not everyone can do well.

There is one piece that Gregory says he worked on for six months called "Somebody Else," which was also going to be the name of the album. Gregory decided to cut it and admits, "It would have been too Debbie Gibson and upbeat." After speaking with Gregory for an hour, I realized what I admired most about him, besides his musical skills and friendly personality; he refuses to be

mainstream. The way he is true to himself is what will take his music that much further and leave his listeners on their toes to see what he will produce next.

Gregory Douglass is just another person on the street who's barely noticed, just like the rest of us, but with a voice and talent that is unbeatable.

Larissa lives in Burlington.



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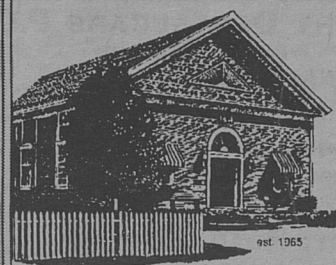
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