

The Rebirth of Naked Folk

A&E

BY SARAH BURGAMY

She's been described as a descendant of any number of folk singers, from the pop-honest lyrics of Ani DiFranco to the signature run-on phrases of Dar Williams.

Though the comparisons are seemingly easy to make, Katharine Quinn transcends categorization as a "typical" folk singer with her debut album *Leaving Decatur*.

For her loyal Burlington following, this first album is a long-awaited compilation of a powerful selection of songs, although far from a majority of the singer's hundreds of self-authored tunes.

Quinn begins *Leaving Decatur* with an unadorned song, "Patience." The fresh simplicity of the opening guitar chords sets the tone for the rest of the album. The sheer beauty of hearing the pick scratch against the strings is a luxury too often missed with the evolution of today's mainstream folk artists and the refinements of studio technology.

Perhaps the very fact that Quinn released *Leaving Decatur* on Screen Door Productions, her own independent label, helps to retain the unadulterated sound of her solo acoustic guitar. The dynamic use of this one instrument makes it difficult to believe that Quinn has only been playing guitar for about five years; she picked it up after graduating college.

Although comparisons to DiFranco and Williams may be accurate when it comes to the tone and presentation of Quinn's lyrics, the sheer clarity of her voice and soft strumming mixed with powerfully picked chords without sacrificing one for the other is almost an anomaly in big-label folk. This blending is unique to Quinn's ability to conquer a difficult task: to sing from the soul.

Quinn's lyrics are nothing less than honest, heartfelt, real, and powerful, as the stories are certain to be at least partially autobiographical. Certainly the shortest song of the 16 on the album, "Fuck a Folk Singer," is presented as a discourse, albeit short, with anyone who has ever approached her with a label she did not embrace: "You told me 'everyone wants

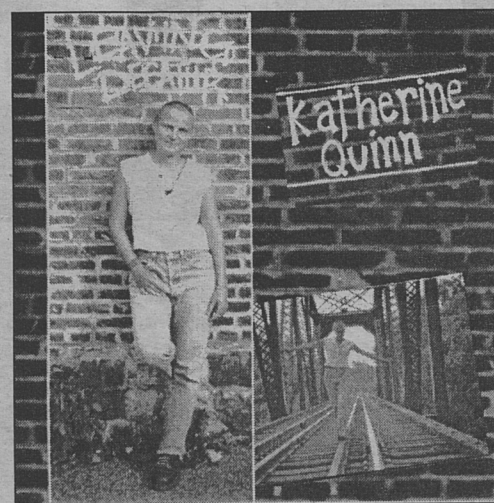
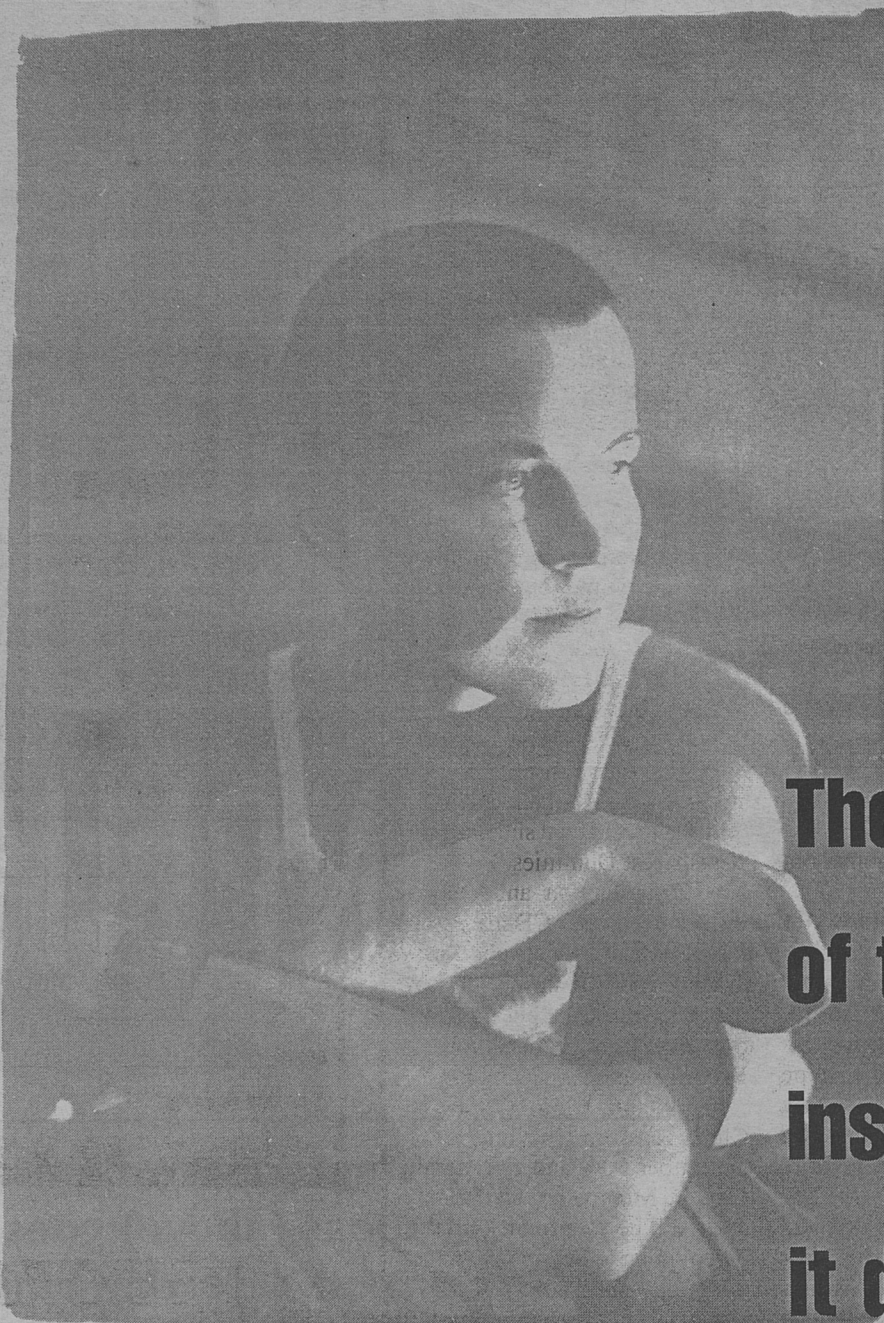
to fuck a folk singer,' I just smiled and silently gave you the finger. But what I meant to say is 'You don't know me.' What I really meant to say is, 'You'll never ever know me, so, you might as well go and fuck yourself.'"

Quinn is not shy about using the occasional profanity; she makes no effort to hide the rougher sides of her reality. Yet the power in her lyrics and voice do not derive from volume, but from an ability to leave notes drifting hauntingly on the air interrupted only the changing of chords. "I am tired. Tired of all these letters and phone bills filling my trash; tired of trying to pull you into the present, you are living in the past...All I know is you are half what I need you to be; I need you to be whole without me..." (from "Patience")

There is no doubt Quinn has acquired a diverse following

due not only to her personal identification, but also to her open lyrics. Identities are not spelled out; there is little or no mention of race, gender, sexuality, or even age. These omissions, whether intentional or not, add to the reading anyone may take on any one of the songs. Quinn manages to reach anyone who has ever been frustrated with love, or the lack thereof, or any relationship, friendship, or courtship.

The majority of her songs center around relationships. This is a large part of what makes her lyrics so profoundly appealing. Relationships, interactions with the rest of humanity are always be a hot topic, one on which people will forever search for answers. Quinn makes no profound revelations to satisfy this search; instead, she embraces the confusion, applies her adept guitar skills and laces it with an enchanting voice.



Katherine Quinn
Leaving Decatur
Screen Door Productions
Burlington, VT

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Quinn's self-proclaimed bisexual identity has played into her music career. She made the decision to be out, not just for herself, but to be visible to those who grew up much the same way she did. A positive figure is exactly what she is;

she produces a strong album on her own label, writes every poetic lyric herself, provides the striking chords of the guitar for each tune and even books her own shows. She is a model of ambition — a poetic soul and her guitar. ▼