

REACHING FOR A DREAM

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— Katie Rukkila



By MARK WILCOX

Gazette Writer

HOUGHTON — Katie Rukkila graduated from Houghton High School in 2001. She is currently a senior at Central Michigan University, majoring in health and fitness with a minor in nutrition. In high school she was involved with sports and other physical activities so her career path comes as no surprise to those who know her.

But recently, Katie took a year to complete a project, something she said she's been wanting to do since she was a little girl. An endeavor that surprised even her closest friends.

"When my friends heard it, they didn't even know that I sang," she said.

The 'it' Katie is referring to is her debut CD "Reach for Me" recently released on Spinout Records. The recording was produced by former Houghton musician and entrepreneur Bernie Larsen. Larsen played all the instruments on the CD and wrote or co-wrote all nine songs. Katie's friends can't be blamed for being surprised. Normally, you would think someone who has recorded a solo CD would have a life-long involvement in music. Not so with Rukkila.

"I would sing in the shower or around the house, but that's about it," she said. "I was never in chorus or band, because I was always too busy with sports."

Although she never pursued her music, it was always there, always inside of her.

"Even when I was young, I thought I'd like to make a CD someday," she said.

Prior to her recording debut, her musical experiences were quite limited.

She had taken private singing lessons from well known instructor and performer, Ann Campbell. That led to a chorus part in a Pine Mountain Music Festival opera. At college, she joined some friends in CMU's women's choir.

"I liked it, but the schedule didn't work," she said.

But the dream wouldn't die. In 2002, she paid a visit to Red House Recording in Chassell where she made a 'demo' of covers of three pop songs. Katie thought that would be the end of it, she made her record, now back to focusing on school. But she hadn't counted on the support of her biggest fans, her par-

ents.

"My dad thought the demo was good and he thought I should pursue a full length CD," she said. "He was pretty persistent."

Dad, Bruce Rukkila, brought the demo to Larsen. Larsen was impressed and said he had a song he wanted Katie to record.

"We started working on it, one song at a time, last Thanksgiving," she said. "It was a lot of fun. Bernie is great to work with and I had a lot of support from my family. It took a year but it's done."

The CD is a soft, soulful collection of songs written by Larsen and various co-writers, including one song composed with Rukkila.

"Bernie calls it R&B, but it is kind of easy listening," she said. (see review on this page)

She said she wanted the CD to reflect her musical influences primarily and surprising considering her age, Natalie Cole is one of them.

"I love her," she said. "Especially the 'Unforgettable' album, I listen to it all the time."

Other influences include Mariah Carey and Whitney Houston. Often performers will be out singing in public for years before they get into the studio. The exact opposite is true for Rukkila.

"I've only performed at two open mics," she said. "It's something I know I have to do more of. But being in college, it's really frustrating to find the time it takes to perform."

The CD has been getting some airplay on local commercial and campus radio stations, although she has yet to hear herself sing on the radio. For the sake of the CD she dropped her last name and used her first and middle names, Katie Marie.

"Rukkila is hard to pronounce," she said with a laugh. "Not a lot of people get it right."

Rukkila has no real plan for her music. For the next few months her efforts and energy will be focused on finishing college and completing a co-op. She'll graduate and then look for a job in the health and fitness field. She is open to the fact that she has a record out there and wonderful things may happen.

"I know it's a needle in a haystack," she said. "But you never know."

"Reach For Me" by Katie Marie

Where: Good Times Music in Houghton and the Community Arts Center in Hancock.

Call: 482-0245 or 482-2333