

# MUSIC SURPRISINGLY SOULFUL

Imagine you're in one of those small diners that every Upper Peninsula town seems to be graced with. Your blue-plate special arrives, served on bone china and Irish linen and you're stunned to see that it's true gourmet fare worthy of a five-star restaurant.

Got the image? Now you have an idea of what I experienced listening to Katie Marie's debut CD "Reach for Me."

There is something familiar and comfortable about Katie's delivery and her material. All nine songs were written by former Houghton music impresario Bernie Larsen, along with various partners, (including Katie herself on "Cold Cold World"). Larsen also produced the work and played all instruments. The songs are new, yet you feel as if you've heard them before. As soon as a song began, a tiny voice inside my head said "Oooh, I know this one." And while I scrambled for forgotten lyrics, I realized that I've never heard it before. Each track is comfortable, easy to listen to, but this certainly doesn't fall into the category of "easy listening."

When a local artist makes a recording the first questions are, "What kind of music is it?" or "Who does she sound like?"

I guess I was doing this before I even listened to the CD. I judged Katie Marie by her age and appearance and assumed I would get teenage angst with a bubble gum flavor — Avril Lavigne meets Lindsay Lohan. Katie and Larsen say the music is R&B. Maybe, but in my day that sound could only by one word, soul.

I was expecting Hilary Duff and I got Natalie Cole instead.

That's why this CD sounds so familiar. It has a heartbeat that I know, it's what I grew up with. Memories of listening to Phoebe Snow, Roberta Flack

## Casual critic

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and Natalie flooded back. The fourth cut, "Come to Me" is quite reminiscent of Teri Desario and Harry Casey's (K.C. of Sunshine Band fame) "Ready for Love," one of my guilty pleasures of the '70's.

Katie's sound takes its genesis from music born long before she was, but she makes it her own. Like any good soul record, the themes are simple. Love lost, love unfound and love gone wrong.

Katie sings with a soulfulness, even a melancholy that 20-somethings are not supposed to have. There's a sense of emptiness and sadness that Katie should not understand, yet she does and it gives her music a depth and texture to make it palatable to a wide-ranging audience.

In the title track, she implores a hopeful lover to quit moping about his lost love and open his eyes to the love that is there for the taking.

"You should know as you're waiting helplessly, somebody's here to hold you while you dream. I know what hopelessness and pain inside can do, I try to imagine that it was me and you," she sings.

These are real life feelings wrought with real emotion, tough for a young singer to pull off. Not only does Katie Marie pull it off, she does it seemingly without effort.

Larsen's instrumentation and production are essential to setting the mood, but don't come close to overshadowing the album's star.

For all it's strengths, "Reach to Me" isn't perfect. Ironically, what makes the CD so darn good is also its only major flaw.

While Larsen has gone to great lengths to showcase his protegee in the best possible light, perhaps he was a bit too cautious. Nine cuts were finely crafted, but I was sold after the first five. The last cuts were just more of the same. They kept taking me to where I'd already been. I kept waiting for a change in tempo, a little less production and a bit more Katie. I wanted it to keep building till it knocked by socks off, but it didn't.

The first half of the recording reminded me of old Phoebe Snow or Roberta Flack records; soulful, sexy, each song building on the one before. I kept waiting to get knocked out, instead it was like getting a hug from an old flame. There were no fireworks, just a warm fireplace.

But that is the worst I can say about this debut and I hope it's just that, the beginning of a long and successful recording career. If her collaboration with Larsen continues, let's hope he gives her a longer leash next time and then stand back and see what this amazing young talent can dish up.

"Reach for me" is available locally at Good Times Music in Houghton and the Community Arts Center in Hancock.

