

Up-and-comer releases encouraging debut EP

By CHRIS ROONEY
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It's a risky proposition for a cute, blond 20-something-year-old to release a CD about heart-break and pain. That kind of world-weariness usually demands some age, some experience and some sad stories that usually take time to develop. It's like a science fiction film: you have to be able to buy into the premise in order for it to work. Any cheesy dialog or subpar special effects and the entire project falls apart. Somehow, Victoria George, who grew up in Fairfax, manages to pull it off.

George released "Far as I'm Concerned" this summer and the five-track CD is a promising debut. George says her music falls into the "alternative country" realm, but it's obvious that her influences spread out all over the rock, blues and country music scenes.

The EP (that's what they call CDs that don't have a lot of songs) opens with "Love Gone," a meandering song that gently prepares the listener for what's to come. While "Love Gone" works, it's actually the only track that doesn't seem to push George into showing off her obvious singing and songwriting abilities. If the weakest track on any release is still solid, that's a good sign. And it's clear why this song is in the lead-off spot. George opens the door with a sense of semimelancholy, sounding a bit like Sheryl Crow, but uses her sense of melody to add some optimism. She cites Tom Petty as one of her influences, and this is right out of his book. It also echoes Chris Isaak, who can turn a seemingly depressing topic into a catchy tune almost effortlessly.

Next up is "Love Sick," and George picks up the pace, not just with her voice but with her orchestration. It's not easy to drop a seri-

VICTORIA GEORGE
"FAR AS I'M CONCERNED"

TRACKS:

1. Long Gone
2. Love Sick
3. Don't Worry 'Bout Breakin' My Heart
4. Tough Love
5. True Blue

All songs by Victoria George.
Produced and mixed by Joey Muller. Mastered by Temple Newbold.

ous guitar lick into a track that's supposed to showcase the singer, but George finds a way. It's reminiscent of Jeff Beck's guitar work with the Yardbirds or, more recently, as the backbone to some of Rod Stewart's and Mick Jagger's solo work. Not at all heavy-handed, the guitar weaves into and out of the song quite masterfully. George still gets to shine, but she lets you know that she's not afraid of letting the music do some of the talking, too.

"Don't Worry 'Bout Breakin' My Heart" is the catchiest of George's songs and if Bonnie Raitt (another of her influences) had recorded it, you might be seeing it on the Billboard charts. George breaks loose on this one, a breezier track than the rest. Again, she manages to put herself in front with sharp, strong vocals but still infuse the song with a musical punch. "Don't Worry" sounds eerily similar to one of those Rolling Stones songs that plumb some depths but don't back off the fact that most pop music is still supposed to be fun. That may be George's strength as a songwriter and composer: she can offer up lyrics that expose some pain but she counters it with a sound that promises a happy ending.

"True Blue" and "Tough

Love" fall deeper into the blues category, and George's ability to pour on a sultry, throaty sound shines through in these tracks. "Tough Love" would please any hardcore Raitt fan.

It's unfair to compare any new artist with those who came before, even when someone like George conjures up some immediate links to very familiar singers. Taken as a whole, the five tracks do remind the listener of Petty, Raitt and others, but it's pretty clear that George has her sense, her own style. To her credit, she doesn't at all come across as the "next" anyone, but instead incorporates a long list of influences and nuances into her own sound.

There has never been a time in the music business when women

were more prominent than they are today. In pop, rock, country and even rap, women are finally making more headway than ever before. Admittedly, a lot of those gold and platinum records are going to studio-created pop princesses who rely more on bare midriffs and solid abs than their ability to write or sing but there's still a market for an earnest songwriter who follows in the footsteps of some of the most acclaimed folks in the game. George, with any luck at all, stands a chance of forging a serious career. If there's any complaint at all about her debut, it would probably be a tendency to rely on melancholy. She handles those themes quite well, but it wouldn't hurt if she lightened up a bit. George seems to come

more alive when she's allowed to pick up the pace and it's a sure bet that her live shows will exemplify this theory. She doesn't need to cover Katrina and the Waves' "Walking on Sunshine" or redo a Go-Go's gem from the 1980s, but when she puts out a full CD of material, it might not be quite as easy to suspend disbelief and think of her as world-weary.

"Far as I'm Concerned" is the type of debut that most artists would envy; let's hope her next step is just as strong as the first.

Victoria George will play at 19 Broadway next Thursday, Sept. 22, at 9 p.m. Visit victoriageorgemusic.com for more information, to listen to samples or to purchase her new EP.