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Friday, October 22, 2010

'Blue Skies' ahead

Singer-songwriter Kim DiVine makes a stop back in the city

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When Holden singer-songwriter Kim DiVine first stood up, guitar in hand, as the opening act one night seven years ago at Tammany Hall in Worcester, she might have been forgiven if her voice, arms and legs started to feel like they were turning to Jell-O.

Not only was DiVine performing solo live for one of the first times outside of college, but she was singing her own material. No fallbacks to something safe and recognizable in case things faltered. "I'm this girl getting up playing. I was scared," Divine recalled. "And it was great. I got great feedback on the songs. Everyone there was very supportive. I thought, 'This is amazing. I've got to do this.' "

It was a significant step on a musical journey that has since taken DiVine to San Diego and now Los Angeles as she steadily works to build a name for herself. In addition to recording three albums, other engagements have included being the voice singing the jingle in recent commercials for Jell-O featuring Bill Cosby.

DiVine is undertaking a solo minitour that will bring her back to Worcester Monday with a performance at 8 p.m. in Nick's Bar and Restaurant, 124 Millbury St. Along the way, she sang the national anthem Tuesday at the New York Knicks-New Jersey Nets preseason basketball game at Madison Square Garden.

The 29-year-old DiVine didn't necessarily "divine" that all this and potentially more would be on the horizon when she first went to Fairfield University. But at that point, she wasn't even Kim DiVine.

Kimberly DiVincenzo had always sung and always wanted to write songs, she said. At Wachusett Regional High School she performed in a lot of musical theater productions, something she continued to do at Fairfield, where she also sang in its glee club chorus. Her major was communications, but lingering thoughts

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of being a singer-songwriter kept up an internal communication. With a vintage classical guitar her mother, Maureen Migdelany, had given her, she finally began to take guitar lessons. "I started to write (songs) even before I knew how to play it very well," she said.

In her senior year at Fairfield she embarked on an independent studies project that included making a demo recording. "It forced me to write songs and finish them," she said.

After graduation, "I had got the bug for soloing." She got a job in sales at 104.5 WXLO and started looking for solo gigs in the Worcester area. She knew a couple of band members of Late Messengers, who extended the invitation to open for them at Tammany Hall. "I played around Worcester more. I learned to play live," DiVine said. Meanwhile, she was building up her own songbook.

Asked about musical influences, she mentioned Patty Griffin ("one of my favorite songwriters") and artists as diverse as Dave Matthews, Pink Floyd and Radiohead. "I feel inspired by lots of different styles of music," she said. She's been described as having a sound that "lingers between Sara Bareilles, Jewel and Ingrid Michaelson." Her songs often deal with love and loss.

In 2004 she decided to take some more chances and move to San Diego, a place she had heard good things about from several friends, although the friend she ventured out there with soon moved back to Massachusetts.

"I didn't know anything and just tried to figure it out musically," she said. She had a part-time day job selling ADT security systems. "Every night I would go out and try to play at the open mics," she said. She recorded a six-song EP titled "Humming Bird" and "got my name around town." By this time the name had been changed — or rather cleverly shortened. While in San Diego, DiVine was awarded Best Female Singer/Songwriter and Best Female Vocalist in the Honoring Acoustic Talent Awards in 2006.

A year later, she moved to Los Angeles. "I felt I had gotten what I wanted to get out of San Diego," she said. "Things have definitely picked up since I moved here."

This summer she sang on "The Tonight Show with Jay Leno," sang the national anthem and "God Bless America" at a Los Angeles Dodgers baseball game and had two of her songs — "Blue Skies" and "Letting Go" — featured in an episode of MTV's "The Real World: New Orleans."

DiVine's been doing well, but musical careers can take time to fully gel.

She said that in LA she has a part-time job as a waitress, working two or three shifts a week. "Besides that, music is supporting me. ... I want to keep pursuing it. I would love to do music full time where I don't do anything else." There are plans to record a new album in the near future. Would she like to have a big hit? "I would. I definitely would. I would love to get my songs on the radio, that would be great."

There are other ways to listen to her songs, and responses on websites should offer encouragement.

For example, "Kim, these are beautiful lyrics, and a lovely song."

Or, "That song is great. Kim Divine I can't wait for the day you'll play it for 50,000 people!"

"I do love performing and I would love to have a solo career," DiVine said. "That was the first dream when I was younger. That's the one I want to make happen."

Meanwhile, she's about to be back among family and friends for a few days. That move to San Diego had "shocked them at first," she said of her family. However, "They've been supportive through the whole thing. They've always helped me out. They're my No. 1 fans."

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For more information about Kim DiVine, visit www.kimdivine.com. Some of her performances can be seen on YouTube at www.youtube.com/kimdivine.

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