

For Immediate Release.

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Debut CD journals the life of a “Pathological Optimist”

From the first note, Nikki Modellmog sounds familiar. The rich voice, the intricate melodies, the unapologetic lyrics bring to mind such artists as Michelle Shocked, Lisa Loeb, Patti Griffin and, clearly, Ani DiFranco.

Yet there is something remarkably fresh and daring about Nikki that has been captured on her debut CD, "Pathological Optimist."

The music is a reflection of the woman. Nikki grew up in the Mennonite farming town of Moundridge, Kansas -- but you wouldn't know it by looking at her. With wild hair pulled into pigtails, homemade tie-dye shirt and flowing skirt, she hardly fits the conservative Kansas stereotype. Nor is there much Gen X to be found in her 1920s-era glasses or burnt-orange VW Westfalia bus (built the same year she was born). Nikki looks every bit the quirky, comfortable old soul friends know her to be. In a time and culture of pretentiousness, Nikki is adorably herself.

At 24, after college, marriage, divorce and a move to Wichita, Nikki picked up the guitar. Six months later, she wrote her first song.

"I was at a place in my life where I needed to work things out," she remembers. "The best place to do that was in music. I could sing things that I didn't know how to say. Putting what I was feeling into four verses and a chorus helped me get on with my life."

Along the way, Nikki was helped by the monthly singer-songwriter circle at Wichita's legendary Artichoke Sandwich Bar.

"I'd been writing for less than a year the first time I sat in. I remember listening to a few of the writers, thinking 'I want to be able to write like that.' When the really good ones started telling me how much they liked what I was doing, I got serious about my music. It became something I wanted to share."

Bryan Masters, songwriter and de facto leader of the circle, said, "I never know how to describe what Nikki writes. It's all so simultaneously clueless and wise. I think that translates well to people. She has a way of seeing things that the rest of us have been blind to. We all feel it. But she puts it to music."

That newcomer's look at life may explain why so much of Nikki's material delivers such a "didn't-see-that-coming" punch. The 10 self-penned songs that make up "Pathological Optimist" are told from a personal point of view, but they strike a universal nerve. Her simply stated observations of the overlooked become powerful, melodic epiphanies.

Nikki sings of imagined lovers, deafening silence, false starts and neglected beds. Her characters challenge each other and themselves. They hold on, they let go, they grow.

The one thing they refuse to do is fit into nice, neat categories. Nikki's disc is an eclectic collection that ranges from ballads to bluegrass to pop to tribal rhythms.

"That's one thing I like about being a solo artist," Nikki said. "I don't have to make the song fit a band's sound. I bring in the sounds I want to fit the music." The sounds are diverse, but Nikki and co-producer Mark Scheltgen have created a disc that is coherent and concise, with songs that fit together like chapters to form a storybook.

In nearly every Nikki song is an acknowledgement of vulnerability. "I'm quick-witted and charming, and a little bit cute / but I'll be the first to admit I don't have a clue / about what it takes, how to challenge the stakes / how to find my just-the-right you," she sings in "Play My Game."

Always, there is belief, hope and action. For the "Pathological Optimist," "I don't live in fear; life's too short to waste away / on the meat and potatoes of a candy-laden bouquet / laced with I wish I may, I wish I might / grasping for something that doesn't hold on so tight."

Nikki's music gives voice to the dichotomies of love and the juxtaposition of life's desires and obligations.

One reviewer explained her this way: "Nikki is a charming and disarming mélange of contradictions. Her songs come from an old-soul-meets-Hello-Kitty philosophy of life. In a time of cynicism, she is refreshingly trusting and awkwardly self-assured. She ain't no poser. She's genuine, and she's good."