

Rose Cora Perry does it her way

Indie rocker brings passion for performing to Tillsnburg Ribfest

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NORFOLK NEWS

Before picking up a microphone, Rose Cora Perry was no slouch with a fishing rod. The London-born musician has fond memories of fishing on Lake Erie near her family cottage at Turkey Point. Her family attracted the ire of their more sedate neighbours by blasting rock music—appropriately, the Bon Jovi album *Slippery When Wet*—in hopes the vibrations would attract more fish. “We thought it was funny,” Perry said of what her family calls “rock ‘n’ roll fishing.”

She didn’t get to the cottage much anymore, the demands of being an indie musician eating up all her downtime. But Perry, who will play Tillsnburg Ribfest with another rock musician, The Truth Untold, wouldn’t have it any other way. “It’s everything. It’s the best feeling I could ever feel in my life,” she said sharing her music with a live audience.

She has felt that passion for performing ever since first taking to the stage as a four-year-old singer. Three years later she was writing her own songs, and at age 15 she formed a record label, HER Records, in order to release her debut album, *Straight from the Loft*.

She hasn’t stopped working since. As a post-secondary student in London, Perry fronted and managed Anti-Hero, a punk rock band that eventually attracted the attention of a major record label. Perry got the chance to



Critically acclaimed indie rocker Rose Cora Perry plays Tillsnburg Ribfest this Sunday.

PHOTO BY MYSTERY MAN PHOTOGRAPHY

perform at high-profile music festivals, but she didn’t love being aligned with a corporate label. Despite being assured she would get help with promoting the band, Perry said she still did most of the work, was pushed in an unwellcome creative direction and is still owed money on the deal.

She started a blog about her experiences, compelled to set the record straight about the music industry’s claim that independent musicians can become overnight stars.

In reality, Perry said, “it’s a combination of hard work, tenacity, persistence and oftentimes just being in the right place at the right time.”

She is grateful for the chance to warn up-and-coming artists against scams and caution them to hang onto their publishing rights at any cost.

“As an independent artist, you very much want to maintain sovereignty over your sound and your image,” she said. “I think I’ve done pretty well for myself independently and I’m proud of my accomplishments.”

While she’s happy to mentor younger musicians, Perry bristles at the suggestion you can just turn on auto-tune and become a pop singer. She has put in 20 years of classical vocal training and taught herself guitar, pushing herself each day to be better.

“There was blood all over my guitar strings because I wanted to be good enough to do what I do,” she said.

There was a six-year gap between her first solo album, *Off of the Pages*, in 2010, and her latest release, *Onto the Floor*, which came out last year. A record label wouldn’t stand for such a lull in productivity from a

new artist, but Perry used that time away from the recording studio to pursue other passions – she’s been a writer and TV host, performed in stage musicals and emceed community events – racking up the life experience she said is crucial to artistic growth.

“That’s a huge part of songwriting – being inspired by events around you and things going on in your life,” she said.

Melodies will pop into her head, sometimes while asleep, and she’ll add chords and lyrics that match the music’s mood.

“You can feel music,” she explained. “There’s an emotion behind melody. And it’s universal emotion. Two people with nothing else in common can connect over music.”

She also took her time crafting *Onto the Floor* because she wanted to make sure every track on

the album was strong – a rarity in today’s single-driven music industry. That meant writing a lot across many genres, but only choosing the best songs for the final cut. “It’s not possible to be a consistent hitmaker. Music, like any art, has to be able to grow and develop into something awesome,” Perry said. “You can’t force authenticity or inspiration.”

Perry made sure to research industry trends so that when she did release her album – which has been met with critical acclaim – she would hit all the right notes

when it came to promotion and social media. The energetic musician remains fiercely independent and is used to doing everything herself, which now includes producing and designing music videos.

“I will be the first to say I’m kind of a workaholic,” Perry said, describing her “DIY hardcore ethic” as inspired by her hardworking entrepreneur parents.

“If you want to do this you have to be serious about it, and you have to understand that work comes first, play later,” she said.

All that work culminates in the thrill of playing live, which Perry and her drummer, Tyler Randall, will do this Sunday at 4 p.m. at Tillsnburg Ribfest. The five, volunteer-led festival – which runs Friday through Sunday at the fairgrounds on Hardy Avenue – is a fundraiser for the Tillsnburg Thunder Senior AA Hockey Club.

It’s somewhat ironic that the proud veteran is playing a ribfest – not her first – but

Perry takes an easygoing approach. She’ll chat about her diet choices if people are interested but she doesn’t see the point of being preachy, preferring to engage in “respectful, open and honest dialogue.”

She’s also glad to talk about MusicSaves, a non-profit foundation she created to help young people by touring high schools to show students how music can be an outlet

to deal with life’s problems. “It’s a truth she under-

stands all too well. “I was the Goth chick going to Catholic prep school. That put a big target on my back,” Perry said.

Bullying led to an eating disorder, which further compounded her depression. So she poured her struggles into song.

“My outlet was to turn to music, because I had all these pent-up emotions that I didn’t want to take out on others and become a bully,” Perry said. “And you know what, I felt a hell of a lot better.”

As a professional musician, she’s also dealt with demeaning insults, some delivered anonymously online. Perry can’t understand the need for all the negativity.

“I would rather celebrate the happiness in the world and connect with others,” she said.

“That happens on stage, where the rocker feels most alive.

“When you sing rock, it’s all about attitude and stylization and being inventive,” Perry said. “That’s what being a real singer is all about – finding your true voice and your true self, and being unique.”

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ROSE CORA PERRY

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