

Free to Fly HILARY McRAE

HILARY McRAE IS THE FIRST “DEVELOPING” ARTIST SIGNED to Starbucks’ Hear Music label, but the singer/songwriter makes compelling music whose maturity belies her 21 years. McRae’s recently released album, *Through These Walls*, showcases her supple voice, sharp writing, and soulful keyboard chops.

“Music has been a passion ever since I can remember,” says Hilary. “I grew up in a very musical family. Like any other kid, I had a lot of other interests, but I would always come back to music. To me, that shows that I was destined to do this.”

McRae began classical piano lessons at the age of five, and was gigging by her teens. She eventually enrolled at Boston’s Berklee College of Music. “I went to Berklee for two years and mainly studied songwriting,” she explains. “But then I got a chance to tour with a Latin artist named Christian Castro, playing keyboards and singing background vocals. I decided that I had gotten what I wanted from Berklee, and it was time for me to explore the real world.”





Hilary toured with Christian for about four months. “The whole experience gave me an up-close look at how to be a professional musician—from showing up to soundcheck on time to stage moves to rehearsing the band to be as tight as possible.”

Now she eyes the road for the first time as a bandleader, supporting singer-songwriter Teddy Geiger on tour this summer. “I’m looking forward to gaining even more experience out on the road,” McRae says. “I hope to play bigger and bigger venues, and be able to touch more people with my music. For this next tour, we’re going to be playing places like the House of Blues—a step up from club venues, but not quite amphitheatres yet. Still, it will be tons of fun, and I’m really looking forward to it. Plus, Teddy is such an amazingly talented guy!”

Although she admits her studio experience before *Through These Walls* was minimal, McRae quickly found her comfort zone when tracking. “Being in the studio is such a different type of satisfaction than playing live,” she explains. “I enjoy the studio for its solitary feel. It allows me to open up creatively and try all sorts of different ideas without worrying about making mistakes. Conversely, when you play live you get the response of the crowd—that instant gratification. And that’s a special thing, too. So there are different things about both mediums that I love.”

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Live, Hilary relies on a Yamaha CP300 stage piano. “I love Yamaha keyboards because they seem to actually embrace the creative process,” she says. “They make it easier for me to get my ideas out, because the touch, the feel, the *presence* of the CP300 is so similar to a grand piano—it’s a rare quality in a keyboard. On other keyboards there’s usually a different kind of feel, one that reminds me that it’s not the real thing. But my Yamaha is as real as it gets. I truly believe that my Yamaha keyboards facilitate me being ‘in the moment.’ And I don’t think that those moments would be captured as easily if I were playing a different keyboard.”

McRae also uses Yamaha keys to create and track her songs. “I actually write on a Yamaha P250,” she says. “I’ve been into those for a long time. But I do love the CP300, and I use it whenever I have to rent a keyboard. One of the sounds I use the most is a Rhodes electric piano patch with a phaser on it, for that cool ‘70s vibe.”

When it comes to songcraft, Hilary always starts with the same simple building blocks. “I always begin with a melody, and the chords come later,” she says. “Then I weave the two together and start to write lyrics to the melody. As far as lyrics go, I usually write about what I’m feeling at the time, usually relationships and life situations that I’m going through.”

McRae is thankful for the chance to take her songs to the masses. “I hope that people will be able to relate to what I’m saying and playing, and things will escalate, and I’ll be able to write more songs and record more albums,” she says. “I’m so thankful that the Hear Music label has taken a chance with me. It’s truly a wonderful label.”

But her ultimate driving force is a simple love of music. “My music just flows through me,” says Hilary. “It’s kind of like catching butterflies in a jar. You have these ideas, and the hardest part is just capturing them and keeping the *realness* of them. If you can keep that, then the good material comes out. It’s honest, it’s sincere, and it comes directly from your heart.”