



Keyboard

BY BOB CANNON

CHANTAL KREVIUZUK



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Ghost Stories

"Ghosts of You"
"All I Can Do"
"Spoke in Tongues"
"Mad About You"
"So Cold"
"Waiting for the Sun"
"You Blame Yourself"
"Grow Up So Fast"
"Wonderful"
"Asylum"
"Wendy House"

Next to ice hockey, Canada's greatest export may well be singer-songwriters.

Neil, Joni, Gordon, Alanis, Sarah ... and Chantal. Don't recognize that last one? Winnipeg native and classically trained pianist Chantal Kreviazuk has beaten out Morissette and Celine Dion for Juno awards in the Great White North but has been overlooked in the States. Her voice and songs have graced countless soundtracks like *Armageddon*, *Stuart Little 2* and *Flicka*, and she's penned tunes for hit albums by Avril Lavigne, Gwen Stefani and Kelly Clarkson. Though her own three albums haven't grabbed America's ears in the same multiplatinum way as Ms. McLachlan and Ms. Morissette, her new

collection *Ghost Stories*—and its stick-in-your-ear single "All I Can Do"—will surely change that.

Produced and co-written by her husband, Our Lady Peace singer Raine Maida, *Ghost Stories* finds Kreviazuk (pronounced krev-ee-AZ-uk) lending her soaring, wounded soprano and expressive piano playing to an astonishing range of songs about past and present friendships, marriage, motherhood, child abuse and demons both real and imagined. It's a bold step toward establishing the former child prodigy as more than a tunesmith for hire, but as a singular artist in her own right.

Kreviazuk, 34, spoke with us from her Los Angeles home, where she lives with Maida and their two toddler sons. In between preparations for the album's release, a tour and the occasional request for marshmallows (from the kids, not us), she gave us the lowdown on songs drawn from deeply personal tragedy and the controversy that can come with collaboration.

This record reminds listeners that your songs are actually composed, not just a synthesis of riffs and loops.

I saw something on the BBC about a certain artist who's doing really, really well. They called this person a "star," said their success is a reflection of their pop and commercial sensibilities, and that this person had massive credibility. That really scared me, because it made me realize that the bar, in a composition sense, has completely diminished. I mean, you can have a completely prepared track of a loop, a riff and a cool drum rhythm, and build a cool track. I'm not saying that it's not a craft to do that. But I'm saying that you can build that, have someone sing some melody that works against that—and then that person will be "credible." That's not songwriting to me.

One of your songwriting influences was Neil Young; listening to him is the law in Canada, isn't it?

I thought it was the law everywhere! I thought that being into Burton Cummings and the Guess Who was the law, too. But then again, being from Winnipeg, I thought being into the Pumps, Orphan and April Wine was the law. I was listening to the Fixx, Orphan and U2 at the same time, and thought that those were all the coming from the same place, as a 7-year-old.

When did you start playing?

As soon as my mom saw that I had this "weird ear" thing, she said, "She should be in lessons," which was very smart. Because when people have a natural tendency to play, others go, "Oh, she plays naturally" and not "That needs to be developed." I was doing stuff that was natural, but I needed technical skills. I feel grateful that someone said, "No, no, now you need to go learn to play the piano."

Is your family musical?

I would go over to my grandparents' house on Sunday afternoon, and at some point they would break out the mouth harp and the fiddle. They played at dance halls on the weekends. So I grew up thinking it was normal, and it only dawned on me several years ago that that was ridiculously magical.

There was this old, old upright piano that must have come from Russia that sat in the corner. We would go from watching Disney at 6:00 and, like clockwork, by 7:05 we were playing hymns and singing. It would eventually dissipate, but I was always left at the piano. It was never over for me.

You had a devastating motorcycle accident in Italy when you were 21. How did that affect your outlook or your ambition?

I had been taking my talent for granted. I had to be flat on my back, screwed, up the creek without a paddle for several months to go, "Oh, that's who I am!" I was in the hospital, my mouth wired, and couldn't move because I was in traction. But I was still singing Whitney Houston's version of "I Will Always Love You" to the staff. I was so interested in entertaining people, finding their comfort zone through music. I went home, got well as quickly as I could, put my demo together, and sent it off. That was it.

What kind of hook did journalists use to describe you?

When I first got out there, I did more interviews about Alanis Morissette than you can shake a stick at. I tried to be polite, but it

was like, "Jesus, we're two different human beings!" It's so funny to me now, because I've learned that everybody has a path of their own.

Did you and your husband/producer Raine consciously not use guitars on Ghost Stories?

Everybody always threw so much guitar on me, and of course I made this art record with Jay Joyce called *Colour Moving and Still*, where to me it should have said "Jay and Chantal," because it had so much guitar. I've always had this relationship, as a pianist-vocalist, with these guitars. Perhaps I was not confident enough yet to say "What I do is I play piano and I sing. That's who I am."

"You Blame Yourself" really shows off your soprano range.

I'm sure I sang it live 10 times better than I sang it on the record. But it's more that I *can* do that, and I should. I should feel those things, because my voice allows me to do so.

We just did a story with Avril Lavigne, whom you wrote with ...

I find it funny that it's in *Performing*

PRODUCT REVIEW

Toontrack: EZdrummer

Multi-layer drum sampler software

BY DAVE JONES

When it comes to laying sampled drum tracks, there's a host of tools available. You could use pads or a drum machine, have a live drummer perform with triggers, or painstakingly enter each hit individually in MIDI-world. Or you can create killer drum tracks in just a few mouse clicks using dhh EZdrummer, a sampler and collection of original drum loops from Swedish sample-maestros Toontrack.

Of course, EZdrummer is not the first virtual instrument to take drum samples up a notch, but it is definitely the most exceptional we've used this year. Selecting samples and auditioning phrases is remarkably intuitive. Once you've "built" the drumset of your dreams, you can drag and drop loops onto your sequencer and hear your song driven by professional session players, complete with variations in timing, velocity and explosive fills.

EZdrummer includes the first of many EZX drum expansion kits, the Yamaha Club Jordan Cocktail kit. Also available separately are the Vintage Rock, Latin Percussion and Nashville kits, as well as the Drumset from Hell, a monstrosity of deep toms and cymbals well suited for metal and progressive sounds. Between the wildly different drum sounds and genre-specific loops,

EZ has everything a songwriter or producer needs to get their music off the ground with studio-quality drum tracks.

IN A NUTSHELL: Don't doubt Toontrack's slogan "great drum tracks in five clicks or less." Our first encounter with EZdrummer completely fulfilled the claim—we had a demo totally sequenced in five minutes.

STREET PRICE: EZdrummer—around \$180; EZX expansion kits—\$90-\$120.



Songwriter. I mean, Avril, songwriter? Avril doesn't really sit and write songs by herself or anything. Avril will also cross the ethical line, and no one says anything. That's why I'll never work with her again. I sent her a song two years ago called "Contagious," and I just saw the track listing to this album and there's a song called "Contagious" on it—and my name's not on it. What do you do with that?

Call the lawyers?

See, I won't do that. I'll just tell you. Art should not be subject to that kind of controversy. Art should be pure. In my head it is, anyway.

To keep things pure, do you have to get into a different frame of mind when you write for others?

What I've learned is that the collaborative effort is a very beautiful thing. It becomes kind of a religious experience. Because it's no longer about me, it's selfless, and there's a lot of sacrifice in that. It becomes completely about that person, their energy, what they are trying to achieve, what they're trying to say. That's why I wrote "*I am small and the world is big*" [from the track "How Does It Feel"] for Avril on [2004's *Under My Skin*], because I felt that that was such an expression of who she was at that time. So it's about representation. But when I sit and write songs for myself, god, that's hard. Because then I've got to really dig deep and be true to me.

For instance, "Mad About You" is a straight love song for Raine.

Raine and I were in a rough spot when I wrote that. We were on separate continents and really aching. And we just had some miscommunication, and all that stuff shook us up. It was written on one of Stevie Nicks' pianos at a friend's place. And days later I found out I was pregnant with Raine's baby, so it was a really wild time.

"Grow Up So Fast" is powerful; what was the basis of that song?

It's a combination of deeply personal things. My cousin revealed two Januarys ago that a relative of ours had been raping her since she was a little girl. The song is about her, and it is about my cousin, Brenda, who died and left behind her 2- and 4-year-old little girls. And it really impacted the 4-year-old, Madison, when I sing about "*your picture's under my pillow*."

Your piano playing incorporates a more rhythmic style than you've used in the past.

That's why I'm so enamored with my



"I'm not saying it's not a craft to build a cool track with loops and riffs—but it's not songwriting to me."

husband's choices and his instincts, because we took the guitars off, and yet the album's more rhythmic and rocks more. The piano actually invites that. That's a really nice discovery to have made.

What kind of pianos were you using?

Mostly I was playing a massive, concert-grand Steinway that was in our studio kitchen because our live room wasn't finished. Now we have a Yamaha seven-foot in the completed studio. We did put on Mellotron a little bit, and we did some padding, but mostly it's straight-up piano. There are two songs that are based on a Wurlitzer on the record. "All I Can Do" is a Yamaha C-70.

Did you do a lot of editing afterwards?

The way I sing, it's not like you can go, "OK, we'll edit out that word." Those are my performances, and they're my piano performances as well.

Did you restrain yourself in your playing on this record?

Yeah, I didn't want to get all fluffy-filly. I hear the piano as a voice, so it should be melody. It's not necessarily completely conscious, but the way I play the piano, my school of thought—my school of rock—has taught me that those parts need to be great. Simple parts in their own way that people can sort of latch onto. It shouldn't be just all this playing. It's not a Chopin record.

There's a solo that sounds like a combination of Monk and Rachmaninoff...

Oh yeah, that's crazy! I used to love Rachmaninoff, too, so that makes sense. I loved the sensibility of Mozart when I was a kid. I loved the form of Mozart, because I was a pop girl, and Mozart was pop to me. But Rachmaninoff isn't very pop at all.

Is "All I Can Do" about your kids?

I was so pregnant at the time. I had two babies in a row, 16 months apart, so that's me having anxiety about my reconciling what I need to be as a human being now that I'm physically a mother. This is hardcore shit we're talking about when you're saying, "I'm responsible for these human beings." I was sitting at the piano, and my husband was away, and I started singing "*All I can do is love you to pieces*," and when it came out, I said, "I hate that lyric," but I knew it was never gonna change.

Is it frustrating being known in the States for all the covers you have on soundtracks?

Well, "Time" is not a cover. It's my biggest [soundtrack] usage ["Time" was featured prominently in the film *Uptown Girls*], which is great because it's my song. Having said that, I don't really care. I mean, go watch Nanci Griffith play; it's genius, and she doesn't write all her own songs. So it's like, "You know what? I'll sing a great song. If it comes out of me, great. And if it doesn't, that's cool, too." ■