

PHOTO BY DEBRA L. ROTHENBERG

Nashville transplant Laura Crisci found out like so many others that having to shut one door can mysteriously lead to opening another one down the road, and like the prodigal daughter, she packed up and returned to her home state of New Jersey and the reality of responsibilities. "Things were going very well in Nashville and I got to play some prestigious rooms like The Blue Bird Café, Douglas Corner, The Ryman, and the Roy Acuff Theater in Opryland until I had to stop playing for a bit to take care of a family on my own, and so I found myself heading back here to New Jersey.

"But after a while things started to slowly settle down and my friends convinced me that it was time to dust off my guitar and get back to my passion for music. So I started playing again and haven't looked back since. I feel like I did when I first started playing—inspired, energized, passionate, and grateful. It feeds my soul and between that, my friends, and the ocean—I am home again."

And home is what *All Is Well* is all about. It's the culmination of things learned and lived and worked out from the voice of the writer who lived the very experiences she sings about. Laura Crisci takes a great big healthy swipe at life on *All Is Well* and the result is a precarious roller coaster ride that twists and turns with blue-collar rock and roll story telling in the vein of Kim Carnes, Bette Midler and Warren Zevon. Using the lush production styles of well-known fiddle man Gary Oleyar, Donald Shirokman,



LAURA CRISCI ALL IS WELL

melodically smart, he's in and out in eight.

"Catch Me If You Can" is a good ole' shufflin' hoedown of a time, blending rock's classic "Not Fade Away" styles with love's zany game of cat and mouse: "I'm gonna let him find me (catch me if you can)."

The dark and sparkling electrics of P.K. Lavengood bite down hard here and his nylon-stringed break steers the tune into a colorful direction. Drumming by Phil Florio is subtle and solid,

charting gem in multiple genres such as adult contemporary and country crossover. Addictive choruses and hypnotic melody pushed this one down the chute, combining Midler-vibed vocals with tight springy Dobro lines flying high over piano lines, acoustics and warm pulsing bass and drums; they kick four-four into Shirokman's hot and desert dry squareneck solo. Elizabeth Cary's fiddle solo also cuts a deep and sweet groove here, crying

plaintive boardwalk vocal. This is another tune that's sure to be breaking sandy ground with its purposeful Jersey Shore production. There's no need to dilly-dally here boys, get on your Stone Pony and ride.

"I Walk Alone" breaks gritty ground with a refreshing Creole kick. Mixing the Cajun keys of Kristian Rex with one of Laura's most outstanding vocal performances on the disc. Strong, clear and as delicious as a candy cane, Crisci's vocal is rhythmically supported with Boccia, Felipe and Florio who all shine nova bright on this outstanding track as well. All the backing singers here are grade A and this unique departure makes this song one of the big stand outs of the disc.

"Eternity (The Sailing Song)" features the monster talents of Gary Oleyar on violin, recalling the mad days of sails and sloops and stormy seas foaming with deadly sea monsters. The high pitched whistle of Carl Asch calls me back to the bridge as Crisci belts out her raspy Kim Carnes salute, just on the verge of losing it and breaking apart sonically, she manages to stay within the lines and off the plank of this raucous

ship sailing number. I also love the Popeye whistle ending.

"Winter Song" is interesting in its simplicity and message of bleak escape. Some of the background effects tend to intertwine with the guitar outro and distract the focus but after a few listens it's understood. "As Time Fades Away" is Laura's best shot at the ballad, coming off solid and vocally powerful and wasting no time getting into the only Oleyar guitar solo on the disc which is magnified perfectly with placement right after the second verse. Smart, emotional and contemporary feel good for lovers of many styles.

Laura Crisci's use of multiple producers on *All Is Well* is a risky prospect unless you truly put your trust in those involved, which she evidently does here (and rightly so) but Crisci's honest and refreshingly innocent sound is the glue that holds it together in conjunction with Oleyar and Shirokman, and so she pulls off a worthy effort here. *All Is Well* boasts as many great musicians as it does compositions and these guys all should take their bow

as they made this record colorful and large.

The players are: P.K. Lavengood (John Eddie), Gary Oleyar (Loggins and Messina, Kenny Chesney, Bob Seger), Kristian Rex, Arne Wendt, Donald Shirokman, Phil Florio (Southside Johnny, Glen Burtnik), Gene Boccia (Southside Johnny, Phoebe Snow), Lou Felipe (Jobonanno Band), Carl Asch (Empty Hats), Paul Gaita (Juggling Suns), Elizabeth Cary (Blackmore's Night), Pat "The Soul Cat" Toner, Daniel Savini, Wendy Zoffer and Josh and Hayley Kingston.

Laura Crisci writes about the human condition of love. It's about a personal journey through the bad times, the successful turn-arounds and the resulting aura of not giving up when the chips are down. There's no stance against congress or the President. There are no partisan messages, accusations about the ozone or the economy here. *All Is Well* is a fun-filled romp through the blue-collar world of this guitar slinging singer. And at the end of the day that's what rock and roll is all about.

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along with her input, Laura presents an orchestrated and melodic 14-song record to her growing fan base.

"Baby You Saved Me" jumps right off the disc, coming at you with E Street moxy, building acoustic guitars into that golden warm B3 shrill; Crisci throws ragged and plaintive lines out there, bordering on raspy as the bridge takes you chorus rich into P.K. Lavengood's electric and solos. Effective and

staying out of the way of the wide-open production style of Oleyar. Crisci's vocal is extremely catchy, reminding me of early Chrissie Hynde and her harmonica is sassy and coils like a Diamondback up against a rock and a hard place. This is a sing-along number that's sure to have everybody joining in for the choruses whenever it gets played.

"Until They Meet Again" is probably the disc's number one shot at a hit, or at least a

in its simplistic pure Nashville tone and groan as crystal clear harmonies glide choir-like underneath Crisci's descending chorus line. I could listen to this tune way more than once or twice.

"Don't Touch Me" is back on the rock and roll track with its dark and poppy Patti Smith-meets-Tommy Tutone vibe. Straight, fat four on the floor backbeats, snare hits, bass and slashing guitars that ultimately crunch right up behind Crisci's deep and



PHOTO BY BRIAN J. BERMAN

YOU CAN SEE LAURA CRISCI LIVE ON JAN. 14 AT THE WOMEN OF NJ SHOW AT BREWSTER'S BAR & GRILL, BRADLEY BEACH, NJ, FROM 7-10 P.M. LAURA CRISCI'S NEW CD, *ALL IS WELL*, IS AVAILABLE OVER AT LAURACRISCI.COM.