

Music

In The Groove

Donna Dufresne & Gypsy Cowboys know Romance

By: Don DiMuccio

After years of being a performer in and a fan of the New England-based music scene, I've become accustomed to a certain formula to which most regional bands generally confine themselves. Granted, some may lean more punk left-field or jazz right-field, and still others an amalgam of everything in between. But rarely is there an element of surprise when hearing an artist for the first time – at least until I had the pleasure of my initial listen to Donna Dufresne's *Cowboy Romance*.

As is the case with all quality works, attempting to label the style of this disc belies what's truly going on underneath the surface. With an unmistakable Western Swing theme serving as the central backdrop, Dufresne incorporates copious doses of jazz, Latin rhythms, and even gypsy elements that serve Django Reinhardt proud. However, to properly set the stage for the music, one needs to hear about the rich performing background of Dufresne — with stage being the operative word. In addition to her singer-songwriter credentials, the Connecticut-based Dufresne has also been an acclaimed fixture in theatres throughout the area, primarily portraying historical figures in her one-woman monologues. It's abundantly evident that this thespian experience has served her well in the achievement of picturesque songwriting and convincing performances.

To those who might be less than accustomed to the western genre — and I include myself in that dubious bunch — many of the tracks may seem quirky, especially in their vocal arrangements. Let's face it, yodeling never did catch on in mainstream pop, even though The Band made a valiant attempt at it. Dufresne doesn't let THAT little fact stop her in taking chances, such as peppering tracks like "Somewhere in Wyoming," "Take A Little Ride With Me," and "Forever Moon" with yodels galore. Other tricks in Donna's bag include melodious melancholy whistling soaked in reverb, conjuring up fond memories of a bygone era once dominated by the likes of Gene Autry, Dale Evans, etc. That said, even more contemporary country elements make their presence known on *Cowboy Romance*. It's not hard to imagine that the late Gram Parsons would have been at home covering the track "Just Like Strangers," with Emmylou providing backing harmonies, of course.

There is no finer accomplishment for an artist than to educate their audience. After utterly devouring *Cowboy Romance* and absorbing its varied musical shades of country, swing, rumbas, and even a Tango, I feel thoroughly schooled in a previously unexposed style. To my surprise, in 12 short songs I've graduated from unaccustomed novice to unabashed fan.

