

Brazos Valley's Own Queen of Blues

Ruthie Foster celebrates the release of her album *Full Circle* with a trip back to her roots in the B-CS community

By RHONDA REINHART
Staff writer

The blues queen of the Brazos Valley, Ruthie Foster, has added a new album to her royal kingdom. The release party for Foster's debut album, *Full Circle*, was held at 3rd Floor Cantina Saturday night, and Foster said the turnout for the show was great. "There were people everywhere," she said. "It was the coolest thing to see that back parking lot full. People really came out for this thing."

Foster, who grew up in Gause, a small town 180 miles southeast of Dallas, said her hometown was a big inspiration for the album. "This CD gave me the chance to play with a lot of great artists in this area," she said. "I wanted to keep this project local. To me, it belongs to the Brazos Valley. That's where I grew up."

Even the cover of the album has a down-home feel. It features Foster and her guitar in front of the house that belonged to her mother, to whom Foster gives a special dedication on *Full Circle*.

The first track on the album, "Smalltown Blues," is about Gause, and Foster said that is probably why the song has a country, two-step twang.

"I grew up listening to a lot of country," she said. "I spent a lot of

time in the country. I grew up in that cusp between country living and city living."

Foster said she can still remember when her grandmother first got running water and a toilet and when families still killed hogs for the winter.

Full Circle was recorded in Wheelock, Texas, on Foster's own M.O.D (My Own Damn) Records. Releasing the album on her own label allowed her to have a little more control over its production, unlike her stint with Atlantic Records.

"They (Atlantic Records) tried to push me as another Tracy Chapman," Foster said. "Then they tried to push me toward an Anita Baker thing. They didn't know what to do with me."

Foster's eclectic sound incorporates elements of blues, rock, gospel, country and folk, and she said she has always found it difficult to categorize her music.

Her music career began when she was a young girl singing in church. Later, she continued her music studies at McClennan Community College in Waco, where she earned degrees in broadcasting and commercial music. She took classes in music management and music business and learned lessons about music theory that she still uses today.

"Theory is a necessary evil in music," she said. "In a lot of cases, playing by ear isn't going to help me. There comes a time when you have to be able to read."

In 1986, Foster joined the Navy, performing in the Navy band and the Navy Commodores, the most elite band in the Navy.

After leaving the military, Foster's musical goals brought her to New York, where she signed with Atlantic Records and became a part of the Greenwich Village music scene. She worked with songwriters who wrote for Barbra Streisand, Aretha Franklin and Bob Dylan and worked on projects with Tracy Chapman, Bonnie Raitt and Bette Midler.

Foster said she had a love-hate relationship with New York. "It can be a rough place, and it can be beautiful all in the same minute," she said.

Foster returned to Texas in 1993 to care for her ailing mother, but her music was not forgotten. She began playing at Java City in Bryan and Kay's Cabaret, a small club that was located in Post Oak Mall.

She now plays frequently at 3rd Floor Cantina, Fitzwilly's and Chelsea Street Pub, and Foster said her live shows are far from calm. "On a good night, I'll come down and dance with you right in the middle of the song," she said. "I've been doing this a long time, and sometimes it feels like it. I plan on doing this until I just drop dead onstage, which I hope never happens. My dream is to be appreciated for the singer and songwriter I am."

Foster has been with her current band for about a year, and she said she is trying to work toward a tighter, more polished sound.

"I've been sort of rounded musically," she said, "though my next project I want to be more bluesy."

Foster said her future goals include traveling through Europe with just her and her guitar.

"That's the ultimate," she said. "Then I want to come back to Texas. That's definitely where I want to end up. Texas is home."



Ruthie Foster

Music
Review

Foster's debut
soars with emoti



Ruthie Foster

Full Circle

M.O.D. Records

★★★★ (out of five)

Just like the roots of an oak tree provide the basis for its strength,

Ruthie Foster's deep roots in family and home give strength to her powerful debut album, *Full Circle*.

In the opening lines of the first track, "Smalltown Blues," Foster grabs hold of her listeners and offers them a glimpse of her soul.

The album takes its listeners on a journey through heartache and homesickness and makes them glad they came along for the ride.

The most magnetic aspect of *Full Circle* is Foster's passionate, image-evoking voice.

When the Gause, Texas, native sings of dusty small towns, dewberry pie and the Brazos River running through her veins on "Home," even those who have never set foot on East Texas ground can envision the slow-moving pace and country sights of the Brazos Valley.

Through slow, silky ballads like "Rain From My Shoulders" and rockin' songs like "Heal Yourself," Foster reveals her amazing range of ability and variety of musical style.

Though Foster's voice is a true no musician's sound is completely out the right mix of instruments.

Foster's band consists of five talented musicians: Tony Walker on David Feagan on percussion, Mike Lopez on bass guitar and Greg Pate on lead guitar.

The group works well together, provides an excellent backdrop for Foster's vibrant vocals.

"Lost in the City," a song Foster wrote one night when she was in New York City, features guest Ralph Moncivais with a beautiful phone accompaniment.

Foster's bluesy-folky-gospel sound is hard to pin down to one musical style, but if record stores had a "From the Heart" section, *Full Circle* would definitely have a place on the shelf.

Foster's music is full of deep emotion, and it is this feeling that makes songs like "Prayin' For Rain" likely candidates for the CD player's repeat button.

Foster's interest in music was sparked at an early age, so it is no surprising her musical knowledge.

As a young girl, her mother, S. Jones, advised her to, "Open your mouth and sing, girl!" Fortunately, Foster obeyed, and she hasn't stopped singing yet.

Regardless of how successful it becomes, hopefully her sprawling hometown roots will keep her true, her soulful, down-home sound.

But if an oak tree's roots can be grounded no matter how high it grows, so can Ruthie Foster's.

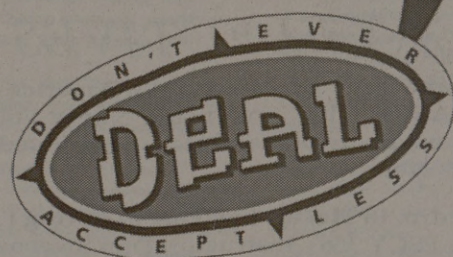
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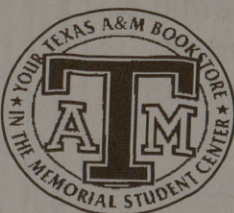
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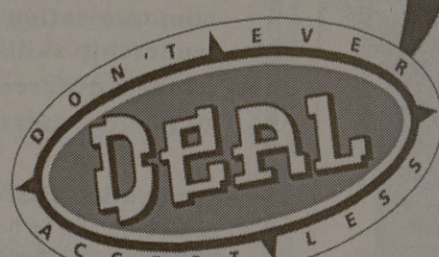
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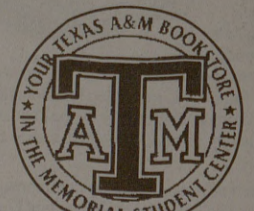
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