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Rock begins at 40 for Hatfield



Musician Juliana Hatfield at home in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Aug. 15, 2008.

PHOTO BY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

Juliana Hatfield's album 'How to Walk Away' is anything but a farewell

BY JOAN ANDERMAN
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, BOSTON

Pop music is a young person's game. Graph the typical trajectory, creative or commercial, of a musician, and you'll see a handful of slow burners and a boatload of downward spirals.

And then there's Juliana Hatfield, whose 20-year career arc is as messy — and fruitful — as her mental state. Hatfield has been, in chronological order: a college radio darling (with the Blake Babies), major-label ingenue, *Spin* magazine cover girl, almost-rock star, short-lived nostalgia act (the Blake Babies reunion), indie supergroup band member (Some Girls), and an alternately raw and ruminative cult artist.

Her sales clout peaked in 1993, with *Become What You Are*, which sold roughly 400,000 copies; Hatfield will be happy if *How to Walk Away*, which she released last week on her own Ye Olde Records label, reaches 20,000 people.

As a cultural artifact, Hatfield hovers in the celebrity purgatory reserved for artists who aren't hot commodities but still matter. You don't hear her songs on the radio anymore, even though they keep getting better. Hatfield can't get a record deal, but she'll be on Leno Monday night, and newspapers from coast to coast noted her 41st birthday last month.

But as a singer, a songwriter, and a human being, Hatfield is just getting started.

"I'm on the edge of something, and it would be so much easier to explain if I had overcome heroin addiction or had some other radical change in my life," Hatfield says over tea at the Four Seasons. "My growth as an artist and a person has

been so slow and gradual it's hard to make a story out of it."

But she has. On Sept. 29, Wiley and Sons will publish Hatfield's memoir, *When I Grow Up*. The book is a far cry from the sex-and-drugs tell-alls that litter the marketplace. Originally conceived as a tour diary of a month on the road with her band Some Girls, *When I Grow Up* expanded into a broad and often brutal portrait of Hatfield's musical and personal odyssey so far. Scabs are picked, wounds reopened, hidden scars revealed. Names and some dates and several locations have been changed to protect the innocent (bad boyfriends, callous record company executives), but conveniently, there's only one guilty party: the late-blooming author.

"I'm not trying to settle any scores. My intention wasn't to hurt or expose anyone but just tell the truth about my life," says Hatfield. "I blame myself for everything."

And therein lies the essence of Hatfield's brand of tormented artist — the self-inflicted sort. Hatfield began life as an affluent, outgoing Duxbury girl. She believes that something went wrong, really wrong, when she hit puberty. The self-described leader of the pack grew dark and quiet, and 25 years later she hasn't quite snapped out of it.

Bountifully musical and pathologically shy, scathingly honest and averse to judgment, Hatfield is a one-woman war zone: the part of her compelled to make music locked in mortal battle with the part of her that's utterly ill-equipped to deal with life in the public eye. In 1986, Hatfield enrolled at Berklee College of Music. Withdrawn to the point where she wouldn't eat in the cafeteria even though her parents had paid for a meal plan, Hatfield managed to meet Freda Love and John Strohm, and the threesome formed the Blake Babies.

There's a secret meaning to the title of Hatfield's new album, an atmospheric collection of pop tunes organized around

a theme of leaving. *How to Walk Away* refers to another possible departure.

Hatfield — who makes her living from music and financed the recording with an unexpectedly big royalty check from song placements in various films and television shows — has been flirting for years with the idea of retiring. She went into the studio last year thinking that this album, the 10th of her solo career, might well be her swan song — a state of mind that thrilled her producer, Andy Chase.

"I told her, 'If you make a record that's a leap, you may have a chance to reinvigorate your career. Or let's go out with a bang.' My agenda was to do something much more refined, something groovy and evocative, and bring out what I thought was a beautiful textured voice, which had been buried in a rock guitar pastiche or because Juliana wouldn't sing out," Chase said.

Hatfield always hated her thin, girlish voice, at least until recently. But Chase put her songs into lower keys, and Hatfield discovered that she has a deeper, silky range. Ironically, she's so pleased (as she should be) with how the album turned out, Hatfield is reconsidering her decision to walk away from music. It doesn't seem to faze her that every major and independent label that Hatfield sent the album to passed on it.

"The rejection doesn't make me second guess myself anymore. I know it's a good album, and I got really good feedback, and I realize that the music industry is sort of falling apart, so I was able to not take it so personally," says Hatfield. But she admits that her diminished stature continues to haunt her.

"I say I've made peace, but it's like I don't want to admit that there's still a part of me that still doesn't understand why I don't get much notice," Hatfield says. "I don't want to seem like I'm complaining. Up until now I thought, 'I'm cool with everything. I'm an artist, man. I don't care if people buy my records.' But I wonder why I don't get much recognition."

[THE WEEKENDER]

Sonic blooms in Taipei

BY DAVID CHEN AND DIANE BAKER
STAFF REPORTERS

Pianist Hiromi Uehara and her three-piece ensemble Sonicbloom performed for a rapt audience last Thursday at the National Concert Hall in Taipei, in an intense, imaginative show that spanned jazz, funk, and classical music.

Being in Taipei revived strong memories for the 29-year-old Japanese musician, who said at a press conference the day before the show that her first-ever public performance was in Taipei at the Sun Yat Sen Memorial Hall (國父紀念館) when she was 12.

Uehara started the evening with a short piano solo in 1920s stride-style, which immediately broke into a fusion jazz rendition of *Softly as in a Morning Sunrise*. Images of the moon and stars were projected onto the curtains behind the band, which set the mood for the aptly-titled *Time Travel*. In this challenging but engaging tune, Uehara's spacy synthesizer sounds and Dave Fuczynski's electric guitar riffs built oblique melodic themes around shifting rhythms.

Uehara often sounds like she's trying to squeeze as many notes as she can in one phrase, yet her playing still manages to sound lyrical and soulful, as it did in the band's rendition of the Duke Ellington classic *Caravan*. Her playing has a light, joyful quality, even at rapid speeds. At times she sounded like she was playing cartoon chase scenes; other times her melody lines were so astonishingly frantic, you could hear people in the audience laughing as if to say "Is this for real?"

Overall the song selection was well balanced. The first set included an abstract but beautifully quiet rendition of *My Favorite Things*, while the second set featured a fun, funky version of *Sukiyaki* and a solo performance of Gershwin's *I've Got Rhythm*, one of the evening's highlights.

The National Concert Hall was only just over half full, but this hardly dampened the sense of enthusiasm towards Uehara and her top-notch backing band, which gave an outstanding performance. The audience clamored for, and received two encores. Before the final encore, Uehara, nearly out of breath and perhaps overcome with emotion, told the audience "thanks for giving me a place to be," then played a tune she recorded with Chick Corea, *Place to Be*.

Over at the National Theater, the Russian Festival Ballet's version of *Swan Lake* was a pared down traveling version, with the bare minimum of dancers needed. That meant Prince Siegfried was one lonely prince, with no friends or companions, there were no courtiers dancing in attendance around his mother the queen, and the ball that opened Act 2 had hardly any partygoers. The usual four acts were pared down to three, though this did not shorten the ballet by much.

I'd like to be able to credit the court jester who took over most of the Act 1 action that is usually given to Siegfried's tutor or friends, and von Rothbart, the evil sorcerer who turned the young women into a flock of swans, for they were the only two performers to show much emotion. Unfortunately, this is not possible as the program only gave a brief synopsis of the three ballets being performed over the weekend and the name of two of the leads (Dmitry Smirnov and Anastasia Chumakova) — nothing else. So whoever you are, thank you for showing some spark in an otherwise remarkable flat performance on Saturday night.

This flatness could have been the result of the company having already done one *Swan Lake* that afternoon, but whatever the reason, I found myself thinking that this production was as close to factory work as ballet can get. The corps de ballet hit all their marks, the swans all had lovely arms, the baby swans were symmetry in motion, all the dancers smiled or looked distraught when needed, the grand jetes and lifts were all very grand, but there was about as much emoting going on as there is in a junior high school band concert.

The other odd note was that the role of Odette-Odile was danced by two women, instead of just one. I couldn't say who was who, because the photo of Chumakova in the program was taken at such an angle that you couldn't really make out her face.

Nevertheless, Saturday night's audience seemed pleased with the results, calling the prince, von Rothbart, Odette and Odile back out for repeated curtain calls.

French first lady **Carla Bruni Sarkozy** will jam live with **Paul McCartney** and **Metallica** on British television next month in support of her new album *Comme si de rien n'était*, which will be sold internationally under the title *Simply*.

The erstwhile supermodel — who married French President Nicolas Sarkozy in February — will appear on *Later* ... with *Jools*

Holland on BBC television when it starts a new series on Sept. 16.

The late-night show traditionally starts with piano-playing Holland and his guests jamming together.

Bruni, who recently featured on the cover of *Vanity Fair* magazine in the US and Britain, will perform "a song or two from her recently released third album," the BBC said in a statement.

While France's first lady prepares to charm British music lovers, troubled star **Amy Winehouse** continues to spread anger and frustration. Winehouse pulled out of the Rock en Seine festival outside Paris after falling ill at home, the singer's spokesman said Saturday as

the furious organizers vowed to sue.

Rock en Seine had to scrap the headline gig at two hours' notice and has now threatened legal action against the 24-year-old. It is the second year in a row that the British soul singer has pulled out of the festival.

Some 25,000 concertgoers were waiting for the singer to appear on stage in Saint-Cloud outside the French capital.

"Amy Winehouse should have arrived on the site early Friday evening. We were told by her agent at 8pm that she wasn't coming," Rock en Seine said in a statement, adding there was "no explanation of the exact reasons for her absence."

The Grammy Award-winning star, who is fighting drug and alcohol problems, has suffered a string of health scares since apparently being caught smoking crack cocaine in footage

released by *The Sun* newspaper in January.

Another pop legend who is not looking his best these days is singer **Michael Jackson**, who turned 50 on Friday. He is now a mere shadow of the superstar once known as the "King of Pop" whose records thrilled millions before his bizarre personal life eclipsed his musical brilliance.

Unlike **Madonna's** 50th birthday bash and launch of another world tour earlier this month, the singer who wishes he was Peter Pan appears to have no special celebrations planned and a much-touted musical comeback has so far come to nothing.

A semi-recluse since his harrowing 2005 trial and acquittal on child sex abuse charges, Jackson has been living out of the spotlight for the past few months.

In a telephone interview with ABC television program *Good Morning*

America, Jackson said he will "just have a little cake with my children and watch some cartoons," and he added that he feels "very wise and sage, but at the same time very young."

Recent pictures of Jackson in Las Vegas showed him dressed in pajamas and slippers, and one had him sitting in a wheelchair, wearing a surgical mask.

Long-time Jackson family friend and lawyer Brian



PLANET POP

Far left, France's first lady Carla Bruni-Sarkozy poses prior to an interview July 11 to promote her new album. Left, pop star Michael Jackson poses on the red carpet during the RainbowPUSH Coalition Los Angeles 10th annual awards dinner in Los Angeles. Right, Amy Winehouse performs at the V Festival in Essex, England, Aug. 17.

PHOTOS: AGENCIES

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