

CD Review by John Schwindt

Kim Palmer: *Songs From a Porcelain Trailer*

In this album of eight songs, singer-songwriter Kim Palmer emerges as the muse of those with MCS, as the diva of the dispossessed. These songs are worth your listen, not because they're about MCS, not because they're performed by one of our own, but because they are genuinely interesting songs performed with exceptional emotional range and resonance.

Allergic to the 20th Century establishes the frame of reference for the set: "Industrialized, deodorized, volatilized for my demise . . . Formaldehyde, benzaldehyde, pesticide, I'm paralyzed!" This doesn't sound very lyrical, because it isn't. There's nothing lyrical about being poisoned. The electronic backgrounds on this and several of the other songs provide a nervous, surrealistic atmosphere that is appropriately disturbing and disorienting.

The Dispossessed is an anthem for all with MCS, especially the homeless. Kim sings it with both the vulnerability and the authority of one who knows how it feels to have lost everything:

Oh, can't you read the warning sign?
This is the modern epidemic unconfessed.
We're trapped inside a toxic time,
With nowhere we can run,
We are the dispossessed,
We are the dispossessed.

The acoustic guitar gives *The Dispossessed* the sound of a classic protest song, while a strong bass line and vehement percussion make this song especially intense and memorable. The pain here is real, much too real.

Coming after *The Dispossessed*, *Bizarre Beds* is welcome comic relief, although it isn't really funny when you can't find a safe place to sleep. In any other album, *Bizarre Beds* would be about relationships—but not if you have MCS. Kim's song conveys both the humor and the gravity of the situation.

Cedar Fever is about—well, you already know. If you crash during the cedar/juniper pollen season (or any pollen season), this song's for you. Don't miss the surprising little bridge in 3/4 time; it's a musical gem!

I Wanna Be a Brat Today deals with the frustration, the exhaustion, and the anger that are inevitable no matter how hard we try to be patient and optimistic. “To feel the joy,” Kim sings, “you gotta let yourself feel the pain/ and rage at the world we’ve made/ where even time seems like a toxic waste.” No facile acceptance here.

Haunted House is maybe my favorite song on this CD. It is ostensibly a relationship song, but it’s also a brilliant metaphor for chronic illness, which haunts your nights and days no matter how hard you try to live a normal life. Kim’s haunted house sound effects, both instrumental and vocal—“Yay-eee . . . Yay-eee,” are scary and not quite funny. I want to laugh, but I can’t; it isn’t funny when it’s your house that’s haunted!

In the last two songs, Kim moves beyond a bizarre nightmarish world of the MCS struggle and explores some of the dreams and hopes we all cling to. *Walk With a Dreamer* expresses the hope for personal wholeness and fulfillment, while *Leave a Light* expresses the hope of all who are “refugees” — the homeless, the exiled, the alienated — of finding our way back home:

Leave a light, leave a light,
Leave a light on out there for me.
I won’t look behind, I’m ready to go.
Leave a light, leave a light,
Leave a light for this refugee,
So I can find my way back home,
So I can find my way back home.

This is a fitting close for this CD, a lovely, lyrical song that you can’t help but sing with and, perhaps, even cry with. It is a comforting way to close this musical journey through the surreal experience of MCS.

Website: www.angelfire.com/az/ox/kimpalmer.html

Kim Palmer died from complications of her illness on October 23, 2006. This article first appeared in Ecologic News, the newsletter from the HEAL of Southern Arizona support group.