

Farmer's Daughters become country queens

A sobering fact settles over the three members of Farmer's Daughter. They are the top drawer of country music in Canada. The Juno Awards and the cash registers attest. Farmer's Daughter is the top group in the business, and when you say it like that it makes them squirm. Only Prairie Oyster is in their league on the national charts these days, and it's been that way for a couple of years. With the release of their third album it looks like their domination will expand even further.

"When we started six years ago that seemed really unattainable," says Shauna Rae Samograd, the one with the raven locks. "What are we going to do now? We are going to continue to make records the way we make records and continue to pursue international markets. That is something we've talked about since the beginning and something we haven't cracked yet. We have toured Europe (including shows for UN Peacekeepers in politically dangerous areas), we have done some work in the States but we don't have (album) distribution worldwide. That is a pursuit now. We are happy with the success we've had in Canada but we'd like to have success in other markets."

They have to go after international markets. Canada has already accepted the three prairie sirens. Nobody can say they've worked harder in Canada to sell albums and concert tickets. There were times when their friends actually worried they were working too hard — consistently playing over 200 dates a year. They were always on the road, always recording an album, always doing a benefit appearance, always spending two hours signing autographs. When would burn-out set in?



Angela, Shauna Rae and Jake, left to right, discuss their ascent of the Canadian country music industry and where to go next. BARRY GNYP PHOTO

Perhaps never, if their current mood holds out. Their third album, *This Is The Life*, is gathering some torrential momentum and critical acclaim. Early indications suggest it will be a giant hit in Canada in spite of flagging interest in country music.

"I'm going to tell you a little story about my brother and sister-in-law living in Airdrie," says Angela Kelman, the blond. "Their radio station in their family van was always on country radio. A year and a half ago I got into their van and it was tuned to something else. I almost freaked. It was so out of character for them, so I asked about it. They said 'It all sounds the same to me and I was getting bored.'"

"When music becomes more business than art, which it did five years ago when it (country music) captured the highest percentage of the market share in sales, it doesn't

take long for the listener to go 'Hmmm. They all look the same; they all sound the same; I'm kinda bored. I'm going to change my station.' Garth Brooks does really well, so the next thing you know every label has two or three or four what we call 'hat' acts. Then it's the chicks. Instead of looking at an act and going with something fresh and innovative, they try to clone the acts...It becomes a factory where everyone emulates the last hit. Who's inspired by that?"

Homogenization has never appealed to the Daughters. They were adding R&B streaks and gospel tints to their sound from the start and never conformed to the accepted new country formula. Instead of doing arena concerts as a subservient opening act for some superstar they chose instead to stand alone in smaller venues,

meeting the fans in their small home towns. Sincerity and honesty over the years means a modest but loyal fan base from coast to coast.

Jake Leiske probably didn't predict this scale of success when she called up her cousin Shauna Rae back in the early '90s and asked her to sing with her, but she certainly had some kind of profound confidence because Shauna Rae was across the continent at a university in Florida taking political science courses.

"What was in my head was I really missed being in the music industry, which I had been in, on-and-off, through-

out my whole life," says Jake. "As an adult that is the only job I'd ever held since my graduation from high-school. I missed the harmony aspect of it. I guess, for me, growing up in a gospel environment I loved it even more than most."

"I grew up singing with Shauna Rae and knowing that family harmony, genetic link thing. I can't explain it; it's larger than us. Without getting into lingo-dingo, sometimes it clicks and sometimes it doesn't and this is a (total click). Shauna Rae was in Florida, packed up her dog and her boyfriend — of which she has neither anymore — and drove here in a Volvo, from Miami to Vancouver, and that was it."

We knew we needed a third (and that was Angela)."

Their first album *Girls Will Be Girls* launched a half-dozen singles onto the charts, their sophomore album *Makin' Hay* established them at the top of the industry and *This Is The Life* is intended to push them over the borders.

Farmer's Daughter appears in concert at Vanier Hall on November 7. Tickets are on sale at Towne Ticket Centres. Their concert in PG will have an added special ingredient: the title track was inspired by a Prince George resident, Lois the telethon caterer, who's voice is used in the song. The girls hope to show Lois off at the show.

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