

Michaela Foster Marsh finds solace in writing

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"I was really not very confident in my music," she says of those first tentative steps. "I was just a fan of everybody else's and never thought anybody would take me seriously as a writer." She did, however, decide to record her tribute to her brother in order to send a copy to her parents.

"I got the courage up to book Raven Street studio for three hours, because they have a grand piano," she continues. "I think I recorded about six piano-vocal tracks. And Raven Street called me and said, 'This is really good, Michaela. Why are you not pursuing it?' Because they knew I was just doing this thing for my parents. So they encouraged me to go on with it."

"It was just after I had lost (my brother) Frankie, so it kind of helped feel like there was maybe some kind of purpose to his death, in a way. I know that wasn't the case, but it helped me. I had to focus on that, it gave me a goal. It was a dream of mine and Frankie was always encouraging me to write. And I felt it was like his spirit was saying, 'You have to do this.'"

"From then, I've just found that, when things bother me, I write. It's like therapy: just get it out on paper and it seems to make me feel better. It's almost like you can't reach it unless you write it."

Marsh agrees that she may, one day, decide that her tribute to her brother should be heard by others, beyond her family, but understandably was hesitant about doing "anything commercial with it," when it came time to record *Fairy Tales*. She felt similar concerns about another composition, which closes the album, written in response to the 1996 killings of 16 schoolchildren and their teacher in Dunblane, Scotland.

"I said to my producer when we put that song ('The Other Side') on there that if ever there's money made, I would want to make sure that some part of the proceeds went to some fund for the children. Because I can't see making money out of bloodshed. I guess, having lost a brother, there was a level of empathy that I could never have

experienced if that hadn't happened to me."

Other songs on *Fairy Tales* gained meaning after Marsh had recorded them, particularly two songs ('Rag Doll' and 'Drawn') based on lyrics written by her father, a former Church of Scotland minister.

"My dad had maybe realized that life was short and had sent me some work that he'd done years ago," Marsh relates. "One of them, in particular, ('Rag Doll') he had written in 1979, when I was just a young girl, and I thought it would be wonderful to be able to put music to it and have it on this album."

"We were kinda rushing to get it done. I wanted him to hear it and I wanted it to go on the album." After recording the song, however, Kavanagh was called away to complete another project, leaving Marsh to journey back to Ottawa, tape in hand, for a short break. Upon her return, however, news that her father was seriously ill sent the musician back to Scotland.

"I got back to Scotland," she says, "and I still had the tape in my pocket. If Greg hadn't suggested I take it home, we wouldn't have been able to get it there in time." Marsh played the song for her father, shortly before he passed away. "He wasn't able to talk," she smiles, "but he cried."

The title of Marsh's album, then, seems perfectly appropriate for its sometimes weighty contents. Marsh is reluctant to discuss specifics about her lyrics, "because it closes it off" for listeners, but the sense of loss, and of faith, expressed clearly comes from experience.

"You don't want to be so self-absorbed that nobody else can get in there," she says of her themes. "But at the same time, it's amazing how many people see things that I never would have imagined."

Marsh seems to surprise herself, really, when it comes to her musical abilities. Yet she counters suggestions that her music is, perhaps, "not commercially hooky" by noting that, "to me, the hook is the story."

For next Thursday's CD release show, Marsh and her piano will be joined, on six songs, by a string quartet (cellist Jan Jarvlepp, viola

player Sarah Ross and violinists Sunita Gingras and Scott Chency), in order to do justice to the beauty of her fairy tales.

Marsh jokes that her "claim to fame," to date has been that she was "the top student in Glasgow for dress design." One suspects that will shortly be replaced. After all, as Marsh enthuses, "Hugh (Marsh) actually likes the album, which is great!"