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Arkansas Democrat Gazette NORTHWEST ARKANSAS EDITION

Paula Nelson makes state debut — twice

BY JACK W. HILL Posted on Sunday, August 31, 2008 Email this story | Printer-friendly version

Being a child of a star is a mixed blessing, embraced by some, spurned by others. Some try to avoid the trappings and then reverse course.

Paula Nelson readily acknowledges she has a father named Willie. Nelson, that is. But she's out to make her own kind of music, and is bringing it to Arkansas for the first time. Now on tour to promote her third album, Lucky 13, Nelson has lined up shows in central and Northwest Arkansas.

"The difference in what I've done and the latest is the band I now have," Nelson says. "We've been together about three years and we all just work so well together." Nelson's band members are George Devore on acoustic guitar and vocals, Landis Armstrong on electric guitar and vocals, Matt Hubbard on keyboards, harmonica and vocals, Chris Johnson on bass and Kevin Remme on drums and vocals.

While her dad is renowned for his guitar playing, she is content to play keyboards and sing, and in person, singing is enough for her.

"I write with guitar and piano, and when I play, my musicians are so great, there's no need for me to play piano on stage," she explains. "I used to bring my keyboards with me to shows, but they're heavy, and I wouldn't want anyone to have to carry my stuff. And when I'm playing piano, I'm thinking, 'Oh, God, I don't want to mess up here!'" Before she realized that music was perhaps her true calling, she tried other pursuits in her rebellious years.



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The Eye Center advertisement for Fayetteville with contact information.

The Crescent Hotel advertisement featuring a historical building image.

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other pursuits in her rebellious years.

"I worked as a vet tech for a while, and I went to massage school," she says. "And I was giving massages six days a week and I wanted to be on the table. Then I was a terrible waitress. I had to get away from music for a while to appreciate it." As some might expect, Nelson declines requests to perform songs associated with her father's career, although she's found that many fans are not shy about requesting them.

"It depends on the bar I'm in, or what part of the country or how drunk the people are," she laughs. "But I am reminded of that old joke: 'How many girl singers does it take to sing " Crazy" ?' Apparently all of them ! I even was one of them years ago when I was 19 — I'm 38 now — and it was a karaoke scene, and I would sing it, thinking it was Patsy Cline who wrote it.

"I did do a couple of dad's songs for a big celebration about his 75 th birthday, where folks picked their favorites and my picks were 'I Never Cared for You' and 'Don't Wake Me Till It's Over,' and I found out the hard way that my favorite, 'I Never Cared for You,' was almost harder to sing than the national anthem." Her sound has been called "a little yodel mixed with jazz, blues, country and kick-butt rock 'n' roll," says the Texas Music Times magazine, as it praises five of the 13 songs on her Lucky 13 CD: "Fire Below," " Baby You're Mean," "Find Your Way" and "Day to Day Love." And speaking of "kick-butt rock 'n' roll," Nelson has a reputation for her skills in tae kwon do and also in stock car racing.

"Eight years ago, my dad got into tae kwon do, and now he's a black belt and I am, too," she says. "And I've always thought of a car as my sanctuary, and when the producer of Friday Night Lights, which is filmed here, called and asked me if I would be interested in a celebrity-type race, I jumped at the chance, and I came in second, beating seven guys and three girls. It was wonderful. I loved it, but it's way more expensive of a hobby than I can afford." If musical fame eludes her, she now has hope that maybe acting in movies is her ticket to fame. She has a part in Conflict of Interest, a movie due out next year in which she plays the mistress of Michael Madsen.

"My jaw dropped and hit the floor when I heard what my role would be," she confesses. "I didn't have to act at all for a love scene with him." Paula Nelson Band 6 p.m. Wednesday, Sticky Fingerz Chicken Shack, 107 Commerce St. Tickets: \$ 5 (501) 372-7707 9: 30 p.m. Thursday, George's Majestic Lounge, 519 W. Dickson St., Fayetteville Opening act for Charlie Robison Admission: \$ 15 (479) 442-4226

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