

KELLY STRATTON

NOT JUST A GIRL WITH A GUITAR

It's not enough to just say that music has always been a part of Kelly Stratton's life. Over the years, it's evolved from a hobby to a passion, and most recently, a way to build a community.

Stratton started out playing guitar as a child, but it wasn't until college that music became more than a pastime. "I was an engineering major, so everything I did was very calculated and analytical," she explains. Suddenly, playing music wasn't something she just liked to do. "I needed a creative outlet, and I started writing a lot of my own music."

Soon after the Doylestown native moved back to the borough after college, fate struck: a combination music store and recording studio was being built across the street from her house.

Stratton was excited that this was happening so close to her home and offered to help out once the business opened. The studio never materialized, but through that experience, she met guitarist Justin White. The two have been musical partners since, and around him, she formed her backing band, the Punch Drunk Boys.

With a solid band behind her, Stratton's musical ideas soon became fully realized. "When it was just me playing solo, or with one other person, the songs felt empty," she says.

Taking musical cues from everyone from Liz Phair to Led Zeppelin, Kelly Stratton and the Punch Drunk Boys began building a strong following in Doylestown. Their efforts resulted in record-breaking attendance at Puck when she held the release party for her debut CD, "She Knows," last November. "It was amazing," Stratton recalls. "They actually had to turn people away."

That show became the catalyst for the next big step in her career, one that has allowed her to address stereotypes about women in music.

Some time after the show, Stratton was approached by Puck to host nights that showcased women musicians. Partnering with fellow rocker Courtney Fairchild, the two began "Women Who Rock," a monthly series held every second Sunday on Puck's outdoor patio.

The series is in some ways an extension of Stratton's own musical efforts. "There's a vibe about female musicians, that they all have to be folksy and artsy," she says. The problem, according to Stratton, isn't that those genres are bad, it's that many women with a guitar are immediately – and unfairly – lumped into that category.

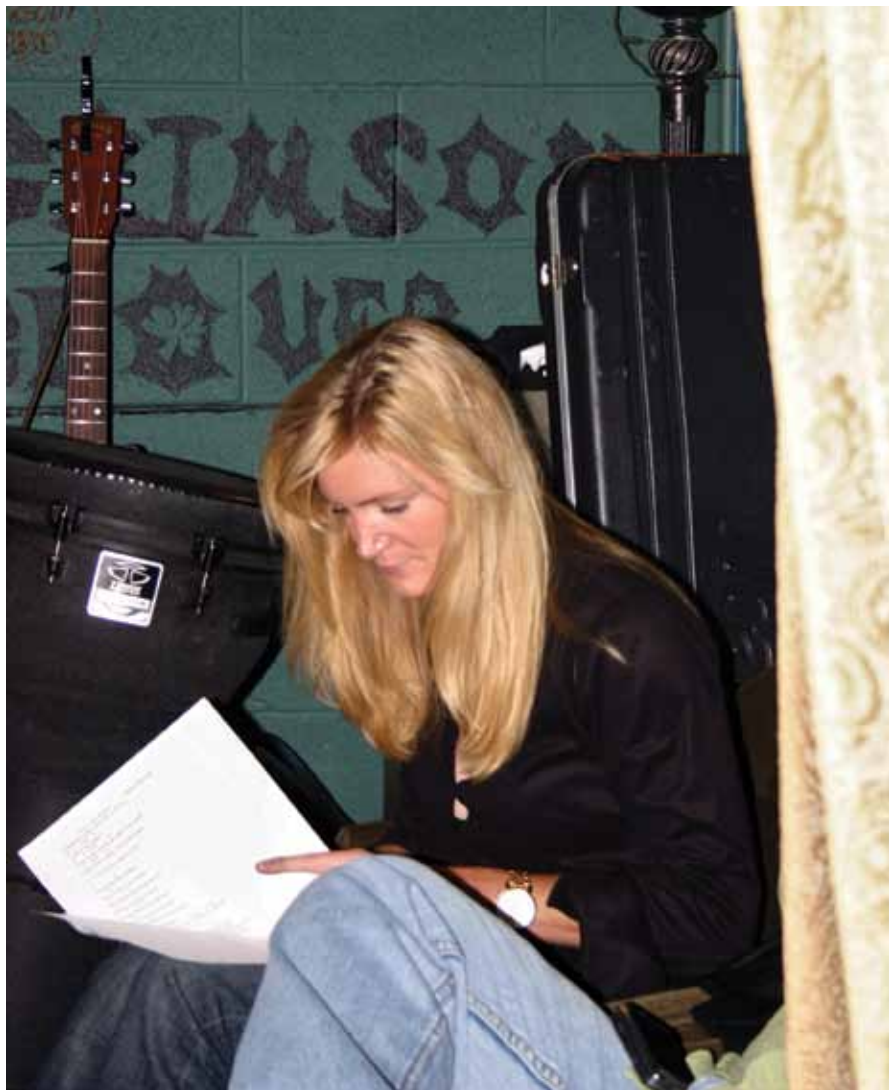
"It's a problem I wrestle with myself," she admits. "I'm not folksy, but as soon as I pick up an acoustic guitar, I immediately get compared to Sheryl Crow or Melissa Etheridge."

To Stratton, there's no distinction between what kind of songs men and women can perform on stage: "I've covered songs that are sung by men, and I've written songs from the perspective of men." Gender, she explains, isn't what makes for a good performance: "If a song says something to you, then you can sing it."

With the "Women Who Rock" shows, Stratton and Fairchild make a point of booking acts that shatter those stereotypes. "It's great finding women who have that moxie and run with it," says Stratton. "It's not that there's no femininity in what they do, it's just that they rock."

The series has been a success since its debut in June. Holding the show outdoors helped, says Stratton. "We had





a lot of people come by wondering what was going on, and a lot of them have kept coming back every month,” she explains. Stratton has heard from bands as far as Memphis, TN, and even a group from Australia touring the states, asking if they can get on the bill.

Although the series will be on hiatus during the winter, Stratton and Fairchild have big plans in the coming year. The first “Women Who

Rock” festival is already scheduled for next August, to be held on a farm in Carversville. With plans to book some larger acts along with local bands, it’s Stratton’s way of moving the community they’ve created onto a bigger stage. “I’m really interested in seeing what other acts are out there,” she says, “and I want to give them a home.”

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