

Nancy Dutra Bio:

At the age of 24, Nancy Dutra quit her well-salaried, full-time office job when she decided that she absolutely had to make music for a living. She didn't really know how to play guitar, didn't think she could sing very well, suffered a lifelong fear of performing in public, and had only written three songs.

It's a testament to her talents as a singer, performer, and especially as a songwriter, that the Toronto roots and country music community embraced her so quickly and wholeheartedly. Like most people

who hear Dutra's music, they were drawn to her simple, poignant country songs of quiet dignity and uncommon grace. In heartbreaking pieces like "I Cry" and "Weak, Weary and Worn," Dutra had equalled the work of some of her strongest influences, like Iris DeMent, Lynn Miles and Lucinda Williams. The songs are timeless; they find the eternal truths in heartbreak, family, and the real substance of people's lives, and they'd be just as affecting 50 years ago, or 50 years from now.

It wasn't long before Award-winning, legendary country guitarist Wendell Ferguson became Dutra's regular accompanist, and she soon graduated from open mic nights in small clubs to opening shows for the likes of Ian Tyson, David Lindley and Jesse Winchester at choice venues. She's since played the Mariposa Folk Festival; toured Eastern Canada; performed in Austin, Texas; taken songwriting workshops with Mary Gauthier and Darrell Scott; and co-written songs with Ron Sexsmith and Kevin Welch.

The intensity of Dutra's songs is partly rooted in the spiritual fulfilment she finds in music. When she was 16, she began to search for enlightenment in a wide



Photo by: Janick Laurent

variety of books and places, from the Catholic Church of her upbringing to Jewish synagogues, Muslim mosques, and Hindu and Buddhist temples. While the Hindu scripture of the *Bhagvad Gita* proved particularly enjoyable, Dutra slowly came to the realization that it was music that was her Higher Power. She's been playing ever since.

The spare, lean strength of her concise songs derives partly from her Portuguese heritage. From an early age, Dutra always enjoyed the stripped-down, folk-blues feel of *fado* music that her parents played for her, especially the *saudade* – the emotional peak of the song where the singer fully, truly reveals herself. Although Dutra isn't as showy or dramatic as a *fado* singer in the performance of her songs, she dares to be no less emotionally vulnerable, soulful and authentic, both in the "voice" of her content, and in her actual physical voice. The lyrics don't typically express joy, but there's a sense of redemption that arises from her close look at the challenges and difficulties of the human condition. She goes deep, and real, and it's powerful stuff.

Dutra inherited that genuine approach from the old-school country music that she listened to while growing up. She grew bored with the music she was hearing on the radio, but when she tuned in to a country station, she was instantly hooked, especially on the traditional old-school stalwarts like Johnny Cash, The Carter Family, and comparable current-day songwriters like Guy Clark and Lyle Lovett. Now, in keeping with her decision to make music for a living, Dutra is recording her debut album, produced by Les Cooper (Jill Barber, The Good Lovelies, Madison Violet), and featuring ace rhythm section Adam Warner on drums and Steve Zsirai on bass (both of whom play with Jill Barber and Royal Wood), and stellar, in-demand session and live guitarist Chris Bennett.

"I love the craft of songwriting," says Dutra. "I don't crave fame but I would like respect for what I do. Writing songs helps me figure out things in life, and I'm just incredibly happy with where I'm at now, with the songs themselves."