



Drew and her Dream

A 2011 Grady College alumna pursues professional music career

BY HAYDEN FIELD/PHOTOGRAPHY BY TAYLOR CARPENTER

A speaking voice like honey, strong and pressing, fills up the Athens, Ga. venue Hendershots to the brim and glides out the windows.

In the audience, a man slips his arm around a curly-haired woman, who has moved to the edge of her seat to be closest to him. Another closes his laptop in order to listen more closely to the honey-voice, which is now singing. People seated in all three coexisting areas of Hendershots—bar, performance space, and coffee shop—all hang on the voice's vibrato, consumed with anticipation as if eagerly awaiting the moment the honey will drip.

Drew Davis, the one generously spooning out honey, sits onstage framed by her long brown waves, black fedora and keyboard. Making eye contact with everyone in the room comes naturally to her, as naturally as she fits within her own genre—soul Americana. One guy seated near the illuminated weathered brick wall nods jokingly along to her song “Kings of Deceit,” as if he shares an inside joke with the singer, then falls back into being hypnotized by the rich vocal notes. The venue's lighting

matches her voice: shadowy and soothing with a few deep colors—yellow, pink, blue, red—and conversation comes secondary to her performance, although low murmurs and glasses clinking provide the perfect base track.

Davis, who has been compared to stars like Patty Griffin, Sara Barielles and Fiona Apple, has been writing music since age six and performing since age 11, when she released her first full-length album. Her music has been featured in several MTV shows including “The Hills,” “Made,” and “True Life,” as well as several feature films. She graduated from Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia in 2011 and immediately moved to Texas to pursue a job at a marketing and management firm and invest the rest of her time in music, thinking she could place equal focus on both.

“My biggest lesson [is that] you really need to pick one thing and give it your all and see what happens,” Davis says. “If it doesn't go anywhere or you're not satisfied, then you can switch to another thing, but sometimes

it's good to have a one-track mind, I think.”

Davis loved her job, and the man who hired her as his first real employee became like a brother to her, even allowing her to take time off to go on brief tours. After moving up to be a director of the firm very soon after starting, she was able to exercise her creativity and really influence the firm's growth, the rate of which tripled in four months—but something still wasn't right. Davis knew how lucky she was to be employed right out of college and in such a stimulating environment, but she had a decision to make concerning her utmost passion. The time commitment was much more than Davis had expected, and she wasn't keeping the promise she had made to herself about putting as much time into her music. After returning from a two-week tour composed of playing a set of shows she loved, singing at a huge festival in her original hometown of Columbus and being accepted to do some vintage-style recordings in a landmark recording studio in Illinois, Drew returned to Austin and considered quitting her job for about a week.

“I've always been kind of impulsive; I'm very practical but also really reliant on intuition or going with gut,” Davis says. “Me and my friends were all sitting at dinner one night, and I said, ‘You know what? I'm going to quit my job tomorrow,’ and they all laughed and said, ‘No you're not’... but I said, ‘You know what? Life is too short. This trip was great; I gotta go for it.’ The next day, I went into my office and gave my boss 30 days, and I was gone.”

For the past six months, Davis has been following her dream like a passenger on a train—confident that she's going to reach her destination even if she doesn't know how far along she is now on her journey. “Putting all your energy into one thing is so important,” Davis says. “Even if you're not the best, if you're really channeling all your energy into being the best you can be, it'll really resonate with people, and you'll get better.” Living out of her Toyota Corolla and touring around the country, Davis is spreading inspiration for others to follow in

her footsteps and overcome fear to go for their biggest dreams with everything they've got.

The songwriting group she's part of in Austin remains constant as one of Davis's biggest inspirations for her songs. A phrase is chosen randomly every Monday morning to serve as inspiration and must also be used at least once in the song, a recording of which is submitted by Sunday. The phrase “in one breath” served as the inspiration for a song about New Orleans, which Davis didn't even realize she needed to write until it came out. The group has opened Davis's eyes to the fact that she writes very quickly and can write anywhere at any time.

“I don't have a journal or a happy place or anything like that; I just love writing songs,” Davis says. “I am a freak; I didn't realize I was a freak until kind of recently... A lot of writers I know need to be with a certain guitar or in a certain chair or something.”

Davis has her sights set high and is willing to face uncertainty head-on in order to follow her passion, so her future plans include continuing to tour until October. In early fall, she'll visit Germany for a two-month overseas tour, then return to Ohio to debrief and evaluate her productivity and strategy from the previous nine or 10 months. “I'm really excited about this new album that's coming out and I'm hoping that that will give me some ideas as to what I'm supposed to do,” Davis says.

Back at Hendershots, performing her song “Paralyzed,” Davis's suspended voice of honey is finally about to drip. Strong and soulful, it suddenly switches to effortless falsetto that seems to lightly flutter down upon everyone's ears. People listen quietly, enjoying a brief respite from the outside world that's clamoring for their attention.

“I have learned to have confidence in what I do and things will work out... for the most part that's remained really true,” Davis says. “I had the tools, the drive, the determination, and I'll always be a little nervous—but not nervous enough to not do it.”

