



Alex Nester: A Young But Seasoned Talent

By Charles Alexander

Girls grow up fast in the music business, and Alex Nester was no exception. Still only 25, the Los Angeles singer-songwriter has had more gigs than most performers could hope for in a lifetime. She began her professional career at the age of nine by singing the jingle for a product that combined yogurt and gelatin into a concoction called Yo-Gel: "Two cool tastes that you are going to love!" Ok, so that lyric was not written by Bob Crewe. But the bouncy recording of the jingle was produced by a musical whiz named Robby Robinson. Keep that name in mind because he'll return to the Alex Nester story.

Yo-Gel was only the beginning. Over the next 16 years, just to give a few highlights, Nester sang at Disneyland with the girl group Knockout and starred in such musicals as *The Wiz* and *Once Upon a Mattress*. She appeared on stage with Florence LaRue, an original member of the Fifth Dimension, and sang backup on a Frankie Valli album (*Romancing the '60s*). Not even a year-long battle with cancer, which struck when she was 16, could scuttle her career. As a matter of fact, in an industry where shooting stars usually fizzle and fall, Nester is only now soaring into the solo spotlight with her debut album: the stunningly soulful and jazzy *Rattle the Walls*. And oh yeah, it was produced by that guy again, Robby Robinson, who happens to be Frankie Valli's musical director and a long-time member of the Four Seasons.

Motown fans will love the ingenious medley of Stevie Wonder songs, called "Sir Stevie," and the rousing guest appearance of the Four Tops on a remake of "I Can't Help Myself." But, given the venue of this post, I'll focus on the Jersey Boy connections, which run deep. The list of the backing musicians is a Who's Who of former Four Seasons, including bassist Rex Robinson, guitarists Fino Roverato and Matt Baldoni, drummer Zoro and percussionist Richie Gajate Garcia, along with the Robby Robinson on keyboards. And three of the current Four Seasons — Brandon Brigham, Brian Brigham and Todd Fournier — sing backup on an exciting reprise of the Seasons' 1967 classic "Beggin'."

That's pretty much it for the oldies, though. Eleven of the songs are a pleasingly diverse batch of originals written by Nester and usually co-written by Robinson, her all-purpose producer. I'll leave it to professional music critics to dissect these new tunes and place them in the current music scene. Better yet, check them out for yourself, since *Rattle the Walls* is available from cdbaby.com, amazon.com and the iTunes store.

One thing is undeniable: Nester has a great voice that she wields with both power and subtlety. My personal favorite on the album is a heart-grabber that she wrote all by herself: "The Music in My Life." I don't know of any better way to say "I love you" than singing "you are the music in my life." I predict that Nester's next 25 years will be as full of music as her first 25.