



Adam Brake photo

Allison Crowe

Good Tidings She Sings, To You and Your Kin

by David Morrison

The end of any year is a juncture in time at which one naturally tends to reminisce, especially about the preceding twelve months. When Allison Crowe looks back at her 2011 she will likely firstly do so with great pride at having reached a significant anniversary in her professional life. The Nanaimo-born and raised singer-songwriter celebrates a decade of artistic independence this year, as her own record label, Rubenesque Records Ltd., can now boast, as she puts it, being “10 Years Free & Strong.” It’s a fantastic achievement for a female artist to successfully operate independently in a male-dominated industry, but even more so when considering that Crowe only turned 30-years old last month.

Since 2003 the end of every year for Crowe has meant one thing, however – her annual series of Tidings Concerts for the Christmas season. And while these now traditional shows present opportunities to witness in the flesh why Crowe is internationally acclaimed as one of Canada’s finest ever interpreters of song, they also generate much

needed funds for causes close to the singer’s heart.

Breaking off from rehearsals at her Corner Brook, NL home, the delightful, ever-friendly and super-talented singer-songwriter-musician recently took time out to chat with me awhile about the upcoming concerts, and their origins as an extension of her 2003 EP, *Tidings: 6 Songs for the Season*.

“It was sort of a natural progression of things,” she says. “I tour a few times a year anyway, so naturally I would be doing a tour at that time of year. I think it all came about before the idea of doing a Christmas album, but I can’t be sure, as I would have done Christmas shows after that album anyway! It seemed like the winter, especially Christmas time, was a good time to do it – a time of year when people are more giving and have a generous spirit. It’s a feeling that everyone has when they come to the shows, and with various great events going on for different

charities at this time of year it’s neat to be a part of that.”

Following shows in St. John’s and Corner Brook, Crowe brings her Tidings Concerts to BC for appearances in Nanaimo (St. Andrew’s United Church, Dec 10), Vancouver (St. James Hall, Dec 11), Campbell River (St. Peter’s Anglican Church, Dec 15) and Victoria (Fairfield United Church, Dec 17). There will also be an outdoor sing-along in Nanaimo on December 22. (Full ticket details and all other show information can be found at www.allisoncrowe.com.)

Attached to each Tidings Concert are charitable concerns and other institutions Crowe personally wishes to place a spotlight on and help raise funds for. In Nanaimo, for example, it is the Nanaimo Youth Services Association’s newspaper, *The Mind’s Eye*, and the Woodland Secondary School’s band and basketball programs, while the

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Campbell River Hospice Society and Food Bank will benefit in that community.

As for which concerns are chosen and how the money is raised, Crowe says: "It's really based on whatever is happening and needed locally. I get together with (her manager) Adrian (du Plessis) to figure out what works, then we talk to the people from the groups, so it's a real community effort, you know? It's really neat, as different shows have more than one charity, and organizations that maybe don't get as much attention can get a little bit, you know? Where the money comes from depends on the situation – you know, the concert itself – so it's either a portion of ticket sales, a portion of CD sales, or that kind of thing."

And of course, these will be Crowe's first Tidings Concerts of her thirties! (I remember turning thirty all too well, as I spent it working away from my home, friends and family, suffering from man-flu in a Belfast hotel room. I just about managed to glug down half a pint of celebratory Guinness before hitting the hay, full of fever. Miserable!) When we spoke Crowe had not yet hit the milestone age, but I wondered how she might be planning to celebrate and how she felt about leaving her twenties behind.

"It feels super-weird because, honestly, I don't feel a day over sixteen!" she laughs. "And I don't feel I've gotten any more mature! If anything I'm less serious, so I feel, like, what business do I have turning

thirty? I'm rehearsing hard right now, but I will have some fun. I'll definitely have a party with my friends, I'm definitely going to make a cake, and I'll probably do some belly-dancing... or it'll be some combination thereof!"

Despite her relative youth and insistence she has yet to grow up, as an artist Crowe is certainly mature beyond her years. She is a captivating live performer and it is how she uses her rare, pure voice to lend new soul to a stylistically wide range of astonishing cover versions that has helped gain her international recognition. One of the music blogs I read every week is the excellent *Cover Me*, which as its name may imply is devoted to the art of the cover version. The blog's writers are big Crowe fans, frequently sending praise her way, but never loftier than when saying: "There are some voices that speak (or sing) for themselves. You know the ones. Voices where it doesn't matter what they sing. Voices where it doesn't really matter what instruments support them. Solomon Burke has such a voice. Jeff Buckley had it. Allison Crowe has it too."

Indeed, from The Beatles to Eurythmics, Pearl Jam to Joni Mitchell, Crowe takes a song and, with maximum respect to the original, nonetheless takes it as her own. Which particular covers and originals await Tidings Concerts attendees remains to be seen, but Crowe did reveal to me that "there will be one new song (of mine),

being Arthur (from the double A-side digital single released in July), and there'll be a new Christmas cover song."

As for the future, there is a new album in the works. "I spent a lot of this last year writing and now I'm in the process of crystallizing where it's going to go," she explains. "Basically, I have a lot of songs recorded in their 'infancy,' but I would like to go somewhere different to where I've gone in the past. The last album was fuller, with more production, but with this next one I'm thinking along the lines of something a little 'heavier,' so another part of what I've grown up listening to. It would be nice to give all of that a voice, right?"

Right! You do whatever you want, Ms. Crowe, as during ten years of Rubenesque Records Ltd. we have come to expect only the highest quality from you!

In signing off for this year I leave you with the words of American news journalist Eric Sevareid (1912-1992), a sentiment echoed in the spirit of the Tidings Concerts, yet bearing a truism we should care to remember at all times, not just the festive season: "Christmas is a necessity. There has to be at least one day of the year to remind us that we're here for something else besides ourselves."

Merry Christmas, everyone.

For further information about Allison Crowe and the Tidings Concerts, please visit www.allisoncrowe.com or www.myspace.com/allisoncrowe