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# Singer & Musician

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**MELANIE DEKKER**  
DOING WELL BY DOING GOOD

**SCHTICK OR STAPLE?**  
THE FINE ART OF STAGE BANTER

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# Doing Well by Doing Good

By Evan Williams

**W**hy did this girl launch her new CD on the deck of an aircraft carrier? She had very good reasons.

Canadian singer/songwriter Melanie Dekker launched her premier CD *Revealed* on September 30, 2006, at an event called TroopFest; a benefit concert and festival put on by the American Red Cross, to raise funds to send holiday packages to US troops abroad. Melanie was on the roster with an impressive list of recording artists, including legendary 80's rocker Greg Kihn and former Santana vocalist, Grammy-winner Tony Lindsay, who performed on the USS Hornet aircraft carrier museum hanger deck for 3,000 service members, their families and the public.

Melanie's TroopFest appearance was most appropriate considering a pledge of up to \$2 million of her record sales are earmarked to go to wounded soldiers and their families. "It's something I never thought I would be involved in, but by doing this, I feel like I just filled my soul with a hundred new songs," Melanie said.

#### A Perfect Match

Melanie is quite possibly the first-ever artist to launch a premier CD with a large portion of the proceeds from every disc sold going to select foundations that benefit wounded soldiers and their families in the US, Canada and Britain. In an arrangement with her record label, Zabit Records, (a division of Sonoma Mountain Entertainment), Melanie has

pledged \$1 from the sale of each copy of *Revealed* sold through CD Baby ([www.CDbaby.com](http://www.CDbaby.com)) up to the first one million records sold. In addition, CD Baby President and Founder Derek Sivers agreed to match another \$1-per-disc, for a total of up to \$2 million pledged to the cause.

According to Bill Zabit, "We're seeking other corporations to step up to the plate in order to increase the pledge per record sold."

"I'm giving something back," Melanie states, "and TroopFest seemed like the perfect place to introduce the song and CD." Continuing, Melanie gets introspective and states, "I have always felt a little bit uncomfortable about the ego of the artist. I've been fearful of thinking so much of yourself that you can't make it in this business. I feel like this effort has allowed me to realize that this is not just about me."

#### Support Before Success

Rock and Roll history is replete with milestones where recording artists establish success and then created philanthropic foundations to support causes near and dear to their heart and soul.

Melanie continues, "I think this is what would have happened over time; if you made enough money, you could put it where you want to. Being a starving artist who still hand-carries her guitar over the border from Canada, I feel like I'm starting early. But if you want to get off on the right foot, why not start now?"

Within three weeks of it's release, Melanie's *Revealed* became the top-selling disc on CDBaby for three weeks straight. Among many recent accolades, CDBaby's reviewers raved that Melanie, "... writes with an incredible balance, a grounded foundation that creates a feeling like toes digging into the soil and yet, her music is simultaneously uplifting, energizing and inspiring. She's been compared to Shawn Colvin, Jann Arden, Annie Lennox, Sheryl Crow, Faith Hill, Jewel, Emmylou Harris, Sarah McLachlan, Stevie Nicks, Alanis Morissette and Norah Jones and yet none of those comparisons quite penetrate beyond a surface level likeness. Dekker's music is clearly her own from the well-spring of her soul's muse."

But success stories in the music industry, such as Melanie's, 'don't just



happen.' It's said that every overnight sensation has been 10 to 15 years in the making and such is the case with Melanie's climb to what can potentially be the cusp of escape velocity on her musical career.

#### What It Takes

Melanie is a tireless and aggressive self-promoter and has pursued and created successes due to tenacity that other singer/songwriters can't achieve even with a team of high-priced managers and promoters. Melanie has performed throughout Canada, the U.S. and Europe appearing with such notable artists as Diana Krall, Chaka Kahn, Bryan Adams, Faith Hill, Ivan Neville and the Neville All Star Band, Shari Ulrich, April Wine among others. In addition, her music has appeared in motion pictures and television, she's won more songwriting competitions than she can recall, and her first independent single, "I Said I," released in 2003 and rerecorded for *Revealed*, charted at #41 on the Canadian AC charts and was the #1 independent song in Australia for four weeks straight.

Melanie caught the music bug when she was in the eighth grade when she saw an older classmate play guitar at a high school recital in her hometown of Deep Cover, Vancouver, Canada. "A little town known as the rainiest place in Vancouver, but with the fog of San Francisco," is how Melanie describes it. "I heard this girl play guitar and I wanted to be her. I had to learn how to play guitar and sing songs for people. It moved me that much. I was a bit of tomboy, all my friends were boys, because all of the neighbor kids were boys, so I love sports and being outside as much as I love being on stage."

Putting her English and geography books aside, Melanie started to sneak music books into her high school education. Receiving a scholarship to Vancouver's Capilano College, which offered creative and applied arts programs, Melanie entered into the jazz program.

"I had no clue as to what jazz was at the time," she quips, "but it was the best thing I could have done. It pushed me into all the places of music that I didn't even know existed, from technical approaches to the instrument to discovering artists such as Ella Fitzgerald. Again, this was another situation where I found myself in a room with 90% guys, but this time they all had guitars, and I felt really challenged. It was honestly a thrill."

Keeping up with the boys was what helped Melanie develop her unique style. "She's a great performer and fun to watch on stage. And the way she aggressively attacks her guitar...she-plays-like-a-guy", says Bill Zabit, "and, for sure, she has a very aggressive, competitive nature."

In 1996, Melanie traveled to Nashville "because if you're going to do it and do it for real, you have to get yourself down to Nashville," she says. "I did a few shows and I really got a good kick in the ass on my songwriting and what it takes."

After years of performing, developing her style, releasing two self-produced solo CDs in Canada, performing and recording with an all-girl side project band in Vancouver called 4 Play, touring relentlessly in Canada, Europe and the United States, Melanie had developed a name for herself.

And then, if you're in the right place at the right time (by playing gigs all over the world all of the time), there could quite possibly come that Cinderella moment that changes everything.

Melanie says, "Bill Zabit, from Zabit Records, heard me sing at a show in New York, way out in the Hamptons at this classic little club, The Stephen Talkhouse, where every single person I ever dreamed of meeting was pictured on the wall. Bill pulled me aside after my set and said, 'I have a studio out in Sonoma County, California, and I'd like to record you.' I was a little sassy, and replied, 'Well, who in California doesn't have a studio, Bill?'"

Zabit, a successful businessman who had sold his Internet business for a staggering amount of money in late 1998, spent almost six years building the state-of-the-art recording studio and his recording label/entertainment production company in Northern California. He founded Zabit Records and Sonoma Mountain Entertainment with his business partner, Scott

proceeding, through professional connections, Zabit, met the legendary David Kershenbaum, who has produced such notable artists as Tracy Chapman, Joe Jackson, Duran Duran, The Jacksons and Tori Amos.

Always looking for unique places to record, Kershenbaum was invited to check out Zabit's secluded recording studio and estate (www.studioestate.com) north of San Francisco in the wine country. Hearing several of the tracks in progress, Kershenbaum simply says, "I joined and off we went."

Elaborating, Kershenbaum says, "A couple of tracks had me instantly taken with Mel's voice, her songwriting, the whole vibe of the record. They had already done a lot of the recording before I arrived on the scene, and it was sounding very good. There was some more recording to be done, such as vocals, and mixing, and we spent a few intense months in the studio getting it all together and finished. It was a wonderful experience, living and working in a very creative environment. It was totally unplanned and accidental rewarding experience with a great singer."

In a recent radio interview between Melanie Dekker and legendary San Francisco radio DJ Paul "The Lobster" Wells, Paul commented, "I feel that it's a beautiful combination and confluence of influences of people that have come together to make the album *Revealed*."

While *Revealed* likely has three additional potential hit singles, including "Stare at the Rain," the whimsical "Haven't Even Kissed You Yet," and the updated "I Said I," it's "Fall In/Wounded Soldier," that is closest to Melanie's heart.

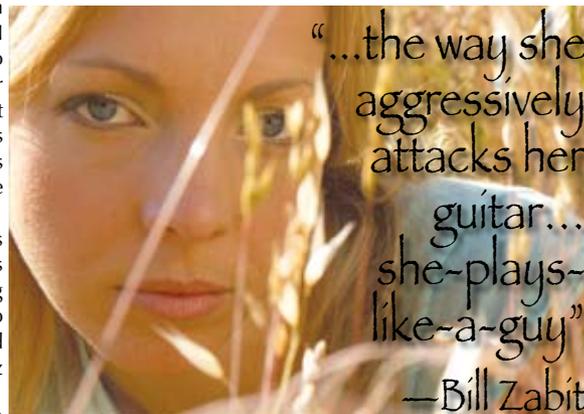
"Fall In/Wounded Soldier" was written by Melanie on her self-sponsored trip to the Hamptons in New York where she played at a benefit for wounded soldiers.

"On the long way there, I wrote the song and played it first at that concert," says Melanie. "It is a strange thing to say, but I overwhelmed myself in those three minutes."

Continuing, Melanie adds, "The 'wounded soldier' in my song represents more than the physically wounded. It's emotional, and it's psychological. It's about being brave enough to love again after your heart has been wounded or broken. It's about healing with love. So, it really is a love song."

"The song 'Wounded Soldier'—she nailed it!" comments Michael J. Wagner, Ph.D., retired Colonel USAR and the executive director of the Military, Veteran and Family Assistance Foundation, a recipient of some of the proceeds generated from the sale of *Revealed*. "We listen to thousands of stories from the soldiers and the wives Melanie is singing about. And the stories they tell are exactly what this song is all about. I am truly amazed."

And about the pledge to wounded soldier and her families, Melanie concludes, "I hope other artists will follow my lead in doing the same. But on stage or off, I would like to believe all of us can make a difference somehow. Make people happier. Make the world a better place." SM



Church, on the principals of a bygone era of the record industry, where labels would discover and develop talent before the release of the first record, as well as through their entire recording career, including recording the artist in the label's own studio.

Melanie began to record songs on just her acoustic guitar, working with producer/engineer, Scott Church, along with Bill Zabit. "From the first few songs, I could tell by the smile on Scott's face that he was very happy capturing what I was doing," Melanie states. "It excited me, because I felt the relationship developing. I was right, I'm sure, in that there are many studios, all over the world, that are very beautiful, but it was the relationship that I almost instantly formed between these two men that had me enchanted by Sonoma Mountain Studio Estate and the ability to create and record there."

As the recording of Melanie's songs was