

By NATE DOW
MUSIC

When Britt Sawdon [Connors] holds her CD release party Wednesday at Johnny D's in Somerville, the West Boylston native will fulfill her life's prophecy. It seems she was born to sing. As family lore has it, her first words were in song.

"My parents have joked about it. They'd been thinking I was just making baby sounds," Sawdon said with a laugh last week, "but one day my dad looked at my mom and said, 'She's singing in tune!' ...

"I think then they knew I would at least enjoy (music) if nothing else."

Sawdon enjoyed it so much she literally got lost in song. "We never went anywhere without music on in the car," she said. "But I never knew how to get anywhere growing up, because I was always listening to the music instead of paying attention to where we were."

That could be a parable for Sawdon's career. She knew even as a toddler that she wanted to be a singer. And after hearing, as a young teen, Ellis Paul perform solo at Old Vienna Coffeehouse, she felt the lure of becoming a songwriter, too. Thus, as the left side of her brain kept pushing the practical -- she chose vocal performance for a major at Ithaca College for its application in teaching -- every decision seemed to be steered by music. Her job as a fitness instructor involved music; her Pilates studio even served as her first performance venue. Then, upon moving to Boston in 2001 for its nurturing, singer-songwriter scene, there was the job she took -- waiting tables at a music club ... Johnny D's.

"Yeah, there is significance to that," Sawdon said of staging her CD release at the iconic Somerville club. "They kind of know me there."

Her self-produced album, "The Bad Side of Good" is an astonishingly strong debut. And her pitch-perfect voice shows amazing versatility in a broad range of styles. The smartly written songs are like personal journals -- many imbued with nostalgia for her summers on Cape Cod. Asked about the title song and if its tale of attraction to a stranger at a bar is in any way reflective of the yin-yang pull of her career, Sawdon, 33, had to laugh.

"I get into this whole sort of dichotomy thing," she said. "I always like looking at the other side of things, sometimes overly so."

With excellent backing on guitar and bass from her mentor, Matthew Dorko, and Mike Connors on drums and top-notch production from Warren Amerman at Rotary Records in Springfield, the album is extremely polished and well-rounded.

Sawdon evokes a young Patty Larkin in her vocal quality, and also is blessed (or cursed) with the same eclectic style. While she veers toward folk, her ongoing stint as the singer with the Compaq Big Band -- performers of great, American standards -- informs her music with jazz and blues.

"I'm still kind of struggling with finding that (label)," Sawdon said. "I usually say something like it's acoustic, folk, rock, blues... But then there's jazz, too. I guess I would call it folk-rock as the bigger umbrella."

Beginning tonight, Britt Sawdon is ready to invite everyone to join her under that umbrella. It is a warm and comfortable place to be.