



"My guitar was kind of just my therapist. Because of what I was going through, the way that I've always written has been fueled by emotion of some kind."

COURTESY/KAT HEART

Still beating

Kat Heart

When Kat Brennan signed up to play an open mic at Pignic Pub & Patio, 235 Flint St., a last year, she signed her name as "Kat" followed by a small heart. When she was announced as "Kat Heart" by mistake, she knew she'd found a new identity in her musical journey—one that hasn't always been easy.

"My backstory is kind of dark and twisted and complicated," said Brennan. The singer/songwriter grew up in Gardnerville but entered foster care at 14 and was raised by her grandmother. Now a single mother of four, she supports her family as an ER nurse, but for as long as she can remember, music was her passion. Until about eight years ago, however, she was forbidden from pursuing it by an abusive partner.

"I ended up in Ohio for 20 years and met a terrible guy—had an awesome kid," Brennan said. "I wasn't allowed to do anything creative for, like, 12 and-a-half years while I was with this guy. ... The day I left him is the day that I bought an acoustic guitar."

After playing her first open mic on a whim, Brennan spent the next few years finding her voice on stages all over the country, playing festivals and bars alike as she turned to music to help her heal.

"I started writing music in a place where I had been under extreme emotional pressure and damage for a really, really long time," Brennan said. "So, when I first picked up the guitar, it was all very, very visceral for me. I just kind of popped a cork on something in my chest and let it flow."

Brennan channels that emotion in her voice. In her originals and covers, Brennan's vocals are smooth and deep, hitting smokey lows in her blues moments and raspy, powerful highs on the rock numbers. She cites '70s rock, folk, indie

and grunge among her influences, and her solo proficiency with a loop pedal conjures appropriate backing tracks when needed.

"I have over two hours of original music that I play anytime, anywhere," said Brennan. "All different genres—folk, country rock, blues, heavy, hard stuff where I scream all the way, to super, pretty light style with the falsetto jazzy stuff. And then my cover list is just the same way, from Tennessee Ernie Ford and Ella Fitzgerald right on up to, you know, Imagine Dragons or old-school Aerosmith."

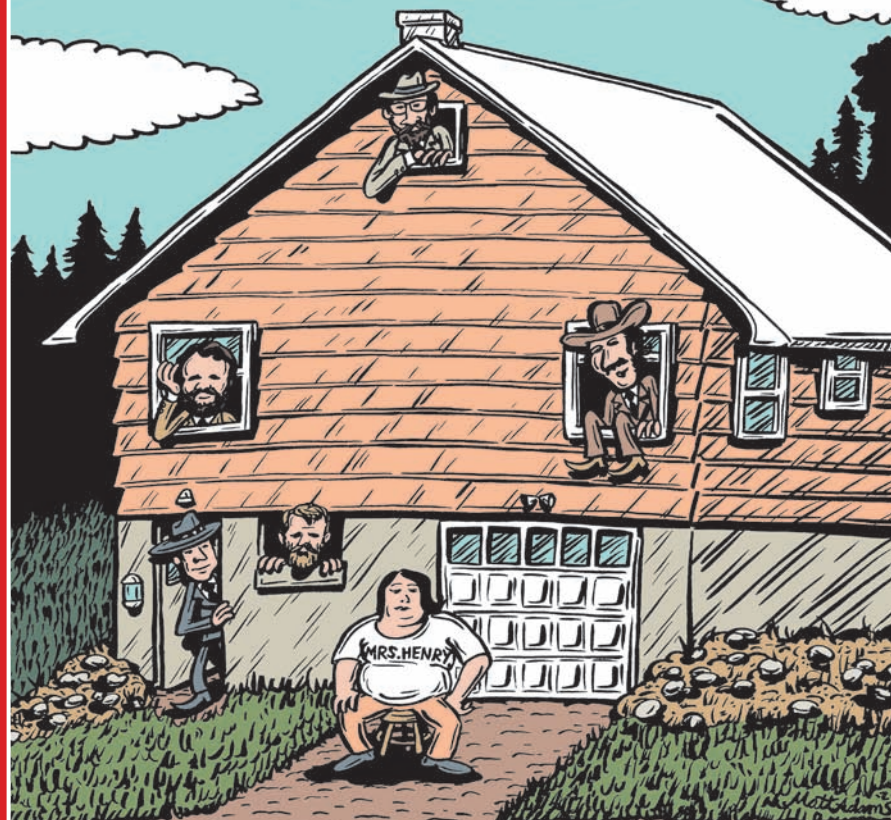
Brennan relocated to Reno last February, where she started to introduce herself to other musicians. Her soulful performances put her on stages at local venues, and after connecting with a few talented local female musicians, her new band The Heartstrings played its first show this Valentine's Day.

"I was like, 'I want to do an all-ladies jam in my house,'" she said. "I kind of do these, like, monthly or bimonthly dinners. ... But I made one specifically for females, and pretty much everybody that came ended up being this amazing musical fit of just really genuine, empathetic, understanding and intelligent females who were also uber talented."

Brennan said recording is her "weak spot" due to her time constraints as a mom and working nurse, but most of her music is available as live videos on YouTube and Facebook while she works on her debut album with out-of-state producer Marc Lacuesta. In the meantime, she's scheduled to be a guest on the *Worst Little Podcast* and holds down a regular Friday night gig at Rue Bourbon, 1401 S. Virginia St. She's on vocal rest throughout March, but she's planning on hosting a new female musician every week in her place and backing up other acts throughout the month. □

Kat Heart plays every Friday from 8-11 p.m. at Rue Bourbon, 1401 S. Virginia St. Find out more at facebook.com/kat.heart.brennan

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