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**M**  
MUSIC

## Yin-yang blues

For a roots artist with some grisly memories, there's always room for dark tunes



Katie Knipp released her fifth album, *Take It With You*, last November. It debuted at No. 10 on the Billboard Blues Albums charts.

BY **MOZES ZARATE** / mozesz@newsreview.com

picked up and shook my bones," she sings, "but I couldn't walk away / a terrible force, the devil himself, stood right in my way."

Knipp says those stories could stem from some traumatic experiences that got her into music in the first place. On her 21st birthday, she witnessed a gory scene when a fellow student at UC Santa Cruz shot himself and fell from a balcony.

"Before that, I was a life-guard at the bottom of a water-slide," Knipp says. One day in

1997, at least 30 kids piled on it, and the fiberglass waterway "tore like a piece of paper." The children fell six stories, and one died. Another fell on his jaw and bit off his tongue.

"They were the catalyst to me writing my own songs," Knipp says of those gruesome memories. "The dark experiences fueled dark poetry, which turned into dark songwriting."

Now, Knipp says she's writing her most candid material yet, beginning with *Take It With You*, released after a year-and-a-half struggle making music while raising two boys.

"Here I was, breastfeeding one, then having a screaming toddler that would tantrum every time I plucked one note on the piano or sang," Knipp says.

"Imagine silence from something you love for a year and a half, when you can't live without it, right?"

That period eventually bred a surprise.

"I was able to start performing again, my entire spirit was different," Knipp says. "I was so grateful up on stage. I was so grateful to just get out of the house."

Knipp recently signed with booking agency Marin-Artists, and will push *Take It With You* for the rest of the year, sporting a full band after a long stint of solo performances opening for legends like Joan Osborne and Robert Cray.

As for darker times, Knipp says, "We all go through stuff, and I'll always still be processing for the rest of my life, as far as experiences go." □

**"I'm just pretty plain [onstage], and I come out there and sing songs like 'Santa Cruz Blues,' which is about three people who killed themselves in Santa Cruz."**

**Katie Knipp**

**Another song by Katie Knipp, another potentially dead body.**

The tune, called "Better Me," hasn't been released yet, but the opera-trained blues singer is cooking up another morbid tale for an untitled sixth record.

"It's about a woman who gets the crap beat out of her, and she ends up wondering if she's going to kill her husband or not," Knipp says.

With a supportive husband, two fledgling kids and a music career on the incline, life is good, Knipp says. It's been seven months since her fifth album, *Take It With You*, debuted at No. 10 on the Billboard Blues Albums charts and at No. 9 on its Heatseekers charts, and ranked among the top modern blues albums in a 2018 Roots Music Report.

In March, the Rocklin singer-pianist and dobro-slide guitar maven won SN&R's 2019 SAMMIE in the Blues category, and her music's getting played on European radio. Still, Knipp appreciates writing the occasional dark song.

"It makes audiences giggle," Knipp says. "I don't have a mohawk or tattoos all over my body, or anything edgy looking. I'm just pretty plain [onstage], and I come out there and sing songs like 'Santa Cruz Blues,' which is about three people who killed themselves in Santa Cruz."

Ironically, the song, on *Take It With You*, is an uptempo invasion of dobro, chipper harmonica and Knipp's distinctly operatic howls: "The wind

Check out Katie Knipp at the Sacto Unplugged Songwriter Series at the Clara Saturday, May 25. The Mindful also performs. Tickets are \$10. Show starts at 8:30pm. 1425 24th St. For music, visit [katieknipp.com](http://katieknipp.com).