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# new Witch

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Pagans on Campus, p. 38

**Find  
the  
Perfect  
Coven**

**Understanding  
Eclectic Wicca**

**Reduce Workplace  
Stress with Magic**

**The Haunting  
Music of**

**Kristin  
Sweetland**

ISSUE #05

photos by Kevin Kelly and  
Kristin Sweetland

by Yvonne Owens

# Kristin Sweetland

## Queen of Swords

### her magic

informs every line and note of her music. An initiated witch, Kristin Sweetland is a Black Cord Priestess of the Thirteenth House Mystery School Tradition of Wicca and Shamanism. A tradition which has been (formally) in existence for about a decade, with a mandate to support self-realization through creative self-expression, Thirteenth House seems the perfect spiritual home for Kristin, who — besides being a talented and acclaimed musician — is also a writer, photographer, film maker and visual artist.

*As gold is to silver,  
as ink is to pen,  
as pen is to paper,  
I write you again ...*

**B**orn twenty-seven years ago in London, Ontario, Kristin bought her first acoustic guitar at age thirteen. Drawn to the sounds of Emmylou Harris, Joan Baez, Ricki Lee Jones and Patty Griffin, she began an intense study of the instrument, and while studying cultural theory and writing at Trent University in Ontario, she played with a Celtic band and began performing solo as a singer/songwriter. She travelled across Europe and North America on writing and photography projects, returning to Canada in 1996 to study music and film at the University of Victoria in British Columbia. She hit the road again at 24, touring music festivals across the continent, sharing the stage with artists like James Keelaghan, Stephen Fearing, Ian Tyson, Laura Smith, Mae Moore, Veda Hille and Ken Whiteley.

The turn of the millennium found Kristin receiving a nomination for the Yamaha Canada Music Award, as well as writing, directing (and recording the music for) a short film called *The Bloodfruit Tree*.

The accolades for Kristin's music began to mount as she toured. *Cosmic Debris*, a Western Canadian roots music magazine, called Kristin "a monster of a guitarist" and went on to say, "This bold young artist's writing skills, vocals and guitar delivery are flawless." In 2001, publicity for the Eaglewood Folk Festival at which Kristin performed wondered aloud, "How do they get this good this young?" And folk guru James Keelaghan has described Kristin's debut CD, *Root, Heart and Crown*, as, "engaging, mysterious and beautifully written."

Talented young artists rise to prominence every year, accruing praise and accolades from a hungry cultural industry and industry critics, but few are as forthright with their rooted Pagan values as Kristin.

Her flagrantly magical lyricism, alchemical references, and haunting imagery begin with the very first cut on *Root, Heart and Crown*, "O Quanta Qualia," a rearrangement of a 12th century Gregorian chant by





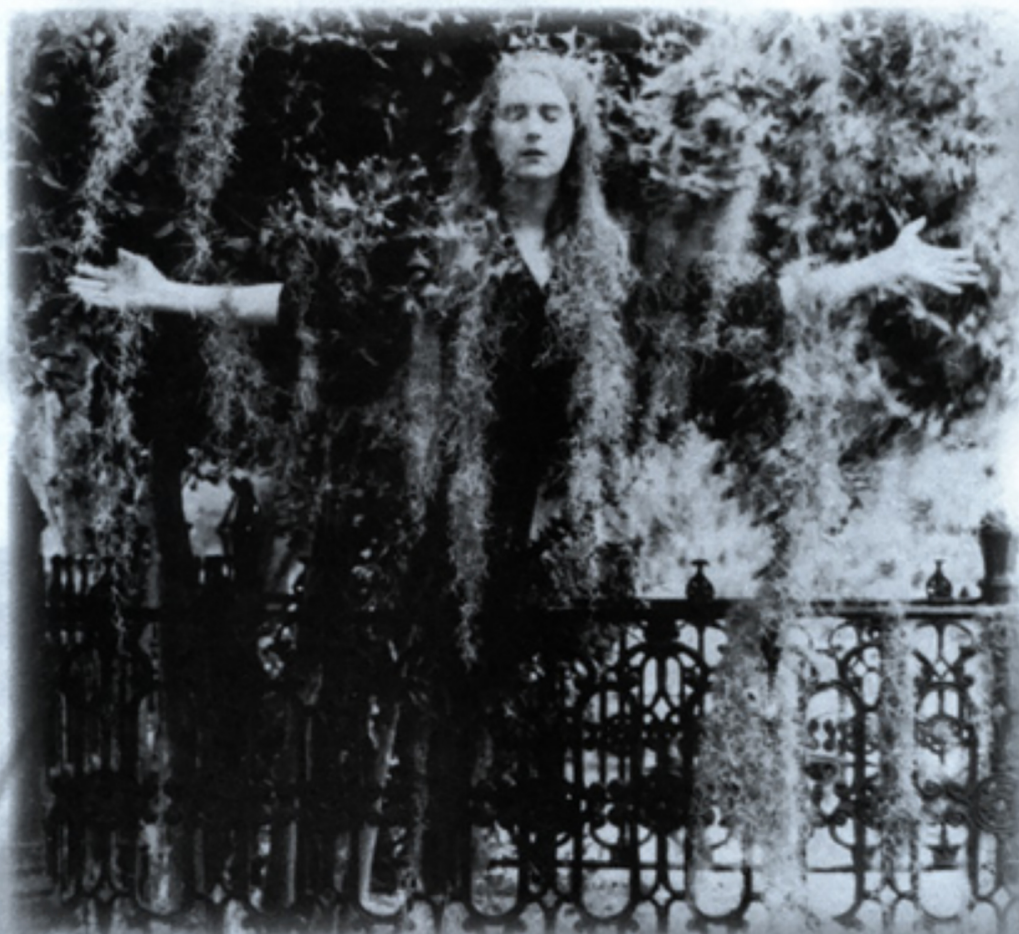
Peter Abelard (of "Abelard and Heloise" fame). Kristin characterizes the pair, thought of as an alchemical couple in some magical philosophies, as "gold is to silver, as ink is to pen." Abelard wrote love songs (dedicated to Heloise) in Latin, in the troubadour style. This version is particularly Pagan-tinted, lauding the great seasonal festivals and the immanence of the Divine: "Oh, how many, how great are the Sabbaths, which the celestial court celebrates eternally, which are the rest of the weary, the reward of the strong, when God will be all things, in all things."

Kristin's arrangement of Abelard's words segues into "The Abbess." An original composition, the opening lines are adapted from the words of Heloise's most poignant letter. It appeals to the (by then) cloistered Abelard, imploring him to recall the eternal truth of their love. Kristin's spine-tingling song captures the erotic magic of their love and of this renowned and subversive letter.

The album contains many such magical creations. "Above Hotevilla" is an instrumental inspired by a visit to an ancient Hopi village and the shamanic flying dream Kristin experienced there, while she describes another instrumental, "Hermetica," as having

been inspired by "the vast body of alchemical texts attributed to Hermes, the Greek messenger God of magic." The two "ghost" songs in the collection are entrancing as well; "Creeping Jenny" (dedicated to a very magical witch now living, working and wildcrafting in the Virginia hills) and "Clementine" both feature deliciously haunted settings and imagery. "Black Lavender" is a Celtic-Gypsy otherworld journey in many tongues.

One of my favorite songs is "Copper Kettle" — a dark but empowering song about loss of love and the art of distillation. This song talks frankly about a magical woman's conscious transformation of grief, anger and loss. Her crucible is a copper kettle; she takes fire, rain water, the copper medium of earth, and the airy, quickening blade of her loneliness and turns it into a pure distillate, the "water of life": the hermetic *aqua vitae* otherwise known as whiskey. Like the character in the song, Kristin has made something fine from something crude — art from the grain and rain of your common, standard heartbreak — known to



most of us ("Oh lonely I know you well"). Though the imagery is profoundly dark ("Now those blackened angels fly me up to the garden in the holy sky"), the message is triumphant and impeccably resolved with a funky rhythm and a clarion refrain:

"Bring me a bed of ashes  
 A shroud of gold and a crown of lapis  
 Let me go, let me go  
 Where the holy water rivers flow  
 For I am the fire and I am the metal  
 Bring me the copper kettle"

Kristin's music has an abundance of heart; her ballad "Clementine," recently won an award from the Ontario Council of Folk Festivals' "Songs From the Heart" contest and "Hermetica" is to be featured on Borealis Records' new instrumental guitar compilation. *Root, Heart & Crown* features

performances by Kristin herself, as well as Stephen Fearing, George Koller, Anne Lindsey and Rebecca Campbell. Kristin recorded *Root, Heart & Crown* on her own label, Arbora Vita Music, named for the hermetic Tree of Life. This album brilliantly integrates the dynamic circuit of Kristin's magical/spiritual/artistic process. It is the perfect debut album, showcasing the multifaceted skills of a wondrously talented, magically inspired and dedicated Pagan artist. To find out more about Kristin's work, see her luscious website at [www.kristinsweetland.com](http://www.kristinsweetland.com). ☾



— Yvonne Owens is a writer, musician, art critic and cultural theorist who is currently completing graduate studies at the University of York in England. She is the author of *The Journey of the Bard and The Cup of Mari Anu*, and co-author of *The Witch's Book of Days and The Wheel of the Witches* series. Her articles and critical essays have appeared in *The Journal of the Canadian Medical Association*, *Artichoke Art Magazine*, *Border Crossings*, *Vie Des Arts* and *SageWoman*.

# Elemental Questions for Kristin Sweetland

**We couldn't help it; when we read about Kristin our editorial staff had to talk to her. Here are the questions we thought to ask — and her somewhat surprising answers.**

**AIR: Your songs are very eclectic. Where do you get your ideas?**

I've been finding myself on stage a lot lately saying, "So ... this is *another* song that comes from my love of studying all things mystical and ancient ..." I find that songs tend to find me. Ideas keep re-surfacing in my life over and over so much that I can't ignore them any longer. A song will often come out of particular period of time where I've been studying something that deeply moves me. Recently, I was reading the Samuel T. Coleridge poem "Kubla Khan" and it really got my brain going. "In Xanadu did Kubla Khan a stately pleasure-dome decree ..." MMMmmmmmmmm. Then, a friend came up to me at a festival out of the blue and started reciting the poem in my ear. A couple days later I turned on the TV and there was a movie about Coleridge's life and his writing of the poem. I took it as a major sign, and I've got a new brilliant idea for a song now ...

**FIRE — What do you feel passionate about?**

I believe in my ability to work hard and change the world.

I believe girls CAN play guitar.

I believe in black leather boots.

I believe in pink satin.

I believe in free will and my ability to create my own destiny.

And most importantly, I believe that all people of consciousness are and MUST come together NOW to help facilitate the impending and necessary change to a more enlightened and respectful way of being! (But that's not likely to be news to the readers of this 'zine ...)

**WATER — Your personal emotions are often rather exposed in your music. Do you think that's important? Why?**

Exposing emotion can often be the key element to the success of a song (and I don't mean "success" in a commercial way). First thing that gets you when you hear a song? — The melody and rhythm. Next is lyrics and content. Then, if the listener is able to connect with the song on a powerful emotional level that will likely be the difference between just a "good song" and a song that speaks to the very depths of someone ...

**EARTH — Let's do something concrete: what five CDs other than your own would you take to a desert island?**

1. Yehudi Menuhin — *Bach Violin Concertos/EMI Classics*
2. *Jesus Christ Superstar — A Resurrection*
3. Patty Griffin — *Flaming Red*
4. Indigo Girls — *Swamp Ophelia*
5. Eminem — *The Eminem Show*

**SPIRIT — Can you describe your personal spirituality for our readers?**

Well, I'm officially Witchy; Witchy to-the-very-bone with an added dash of academic polytheistic high priestessly mistress of the dark demon-slaying nature spirit worshipping daughter of Venusian deliciousness ... Errr, did I say cryptic too ...? ☺