

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS

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Sweet's young, gifted and ready

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When it comes to pop singers who show up trained and ready for their spotlight, they don't make 17-year-olds like they used to.

Take Kelly Sweet, the latest case study in precocious pop teens. She is releasing her debut album, "We Are One" on the Razor and Tie label and has been opening concerts for Paul Simon on his current tour, including this Saturday's Santa Barbara Bowl show.

Sweet joins other teenage singers of recent years, including Renee Olstead and Sonya Kitchell, who possess musical maturity beyond their years. But whereas Olstead and Kitchell have gone down paths more tinged by jazz and singer-songwriter styles, respectively, Sweet is headed more straight down the middle of pure pop.

Sweet is thrilled to be on the bill with an icon like Simon. As she said in a recent interview, Simon "has written many beautiful songs that

have been the voice of so many people, including me. He has written words and music that connected strongly with the true emotions of generations of people."

Although technically still of high school age, Sweet has been honing her musical career for years. A native of Cape Cod, she moved to the small town of Kanab, Utah, with her mother after her parents divorced. Music was always in her blood, and her "public" debut came at age 4, when she sang songs from the film "Pinocchio" at the Cape Cod Conservatory.

"The seed of a flower has no other choice but to become a flower," she says of her lifelong immersion in music. "There was never really a moment when I decided to become what I already was. I had no choice. Music and song flows out of me like air. I need to eat, I need water, I need air and I need to sing.

"My father is a jazz pianist, so I bet it had something to do with the fact that I was hearing music since I was in the womb."

IN CONCERT

KELLY SWEET, opening for Paul Simon

When: 7 p.m. Saturday

Where: Santa Barbara Bowl, 1112 Milpas St.

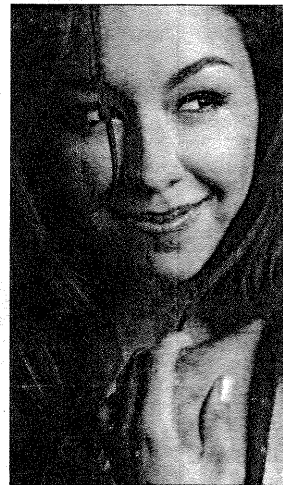
Cost: \$45.50 to \$99.50

Information: 962-7411

With her mother, Sweet headed out from Utah in search of performance and career-building opportunities. One important gig was opening for Santa Barbara's own Kenny Loggins in Vegas.

A more auspicious turn of events, though, came with her meeting Portmann in 2004. The process of making her debut album took a couple years, as she and Portmann worked on about 40 songs before settling on the dozen that ended up on the album.

"I walked into Mark's studio with a vision of what I wanted the music



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to do, and what influences of my life I wanted to use," Sweet says. "I could hear it in my mind. And yet, as we began working our way through the two-year process that it was making this record, it evolved and found it's own way."

Despite the accessible pop air of the album, the song list is fairly eclectic, including a version of Aerosmith's "Dream On," a couple of originals and songs in Italian, French and even Sanskrit.

"Making this record was like

taking the key things in my life and molding them into a whole. I have always had the vision of reaching to the whole world, and singing in other languages is an organic way to do that. Different languages create such different moods, as well, creating an emotional ride. Italian is so smooth, and passionate — truly the singer's language. It flows off your tongue. French is airy and mystical, and yet a bit earthy."

As with Dion's music, Sweet's album makes no pretense to irony or artiness, but it transcends the rapidity of much current pop and dance music. It's pretty, polished music, with a built-in audience.

"People are hungry for something that moves them," Sweet notes. "And in the world today, something that makes you feel at peace is always welcome, even if it's just for the few minutes of a song. That's always been my reason for singing — to heal. But it wasn't that I said to myself, 'Well, there isn't much real music out there, so I should do some.' I was raised on real music, growing up on jazz, then being trained classically at the age of 4. I only know real music."

How would the pop singer, at this tender juncture of a promising career, define success?

"As far as success goes, when told it took two years to find out what I wanted to be as an artist—in making my record — Paul Simon turned to me and asked, 'What do you want to be?' I told him, 'What I am.' " ■