

"No Place"

for Val Halla



Val Halla headlining for "Rockin' Against Hunger"
Saturday, December 18 at Wilbert's.

By Helen Marketti

Val Halla has a positive spirit and hard working ambition to follow her dreams and make them come true. She has written her own songs, released her current CD and toured with veteran rocker, Ted Nugent from June to September as his opening act. Along the way, Val has encountered some challenges and setbacks but she has kept moving forward with determination with what she has loved doing for most of her life.

"I was definitely into classic rock," said Val. "Whatever my parents were listening to that's what I was listening to. I think that's the way it goes for most of us. I remember listening to the radio a lot, too. I liked the classic rock and pop radio stations. The first song that I remember liking a lot was "Africa" by Toto. I was really into that song!"

"I also remember one day very clearly," recalls Val. "My mom had my sister and I sit in the living room and she said, "This is the greatest rock song that has ever been written!" She then played for us, "Stairway to Heaven" by Led Zeppelin. My mom made us sit and listen to the entire song and I remember thinking that this couldn't be rock and roll because it started out so slow but then it builds up. It was the first Led Zeppelin song that I ever listened to."

Playing instruments and writing songs has come easy to Val even at an early age. "I

started playing piano when I about five years old and as soon as I knew at least five notes I wrote my first song which was about my dog," remembers Val. "I was eleven years old when I started playing guitar. I was involved with church youth groups and stuff like that. The worship team would lead the songs on guitar and that's how I became interested in playing the guitar. I started writing more of my own material once I learned to play. It has opened up a whole new world as far as writing songs. When I first started taking guitar lessons, grunge music was popular at the time so I found it easy to play. I could play stuff by Nirvana and other bands like them because it was the same style chord and I could pick it up."

She continues, "Believe it or not I was also into Weird Al Yankovic! I ended up learning his versions of songs before the originals. I know it's a strange way to be introduced to music and songs but it worked for me. I owe Weird Al quite a bit!" (Laughs)

Originally, from Regina, Saskatchewan, Val left home at the age of seventeen for Vancouver, British Columbia because they had a strong music scene that she wanted to be a part

of. "I left during the middle of my senior year," said Val. "I knew this was something I had to do. My parents thought I was being brainwashed by some boy but it wasn't anything like that. They reluctantly let me go to Vancouver where I wrote my first album. I even returned home in time to graduate with my class but after graduation I moved back to Vancouver."

"Bands like Nickelback came out of Vancouver and being in the music scene there, I was rubbing elbows with these guys but didn't feel I was ready yet to share my music with them. I knew I needed to develop my craft further," explains Val. "I also apprenticed as a sound engineer for three years and learned the ropes for recording. I did much of the work for my first album. I was learning as much as I could."

At the suggestion of a friend, Val decided she would visit Nashville to see what the music scene was like and if it would fit with what she wanted to do. "I had been to LA and New York and even though they have great music scenes, there is so much else going on in those cities whereas Nashville is known for its songwriting and that is what appealed to me," said Val. "After visiting Nashville for two weeks, I decided that I would move here. Being in Nashville is all about the songs. It's very songwriting based. There are people you never heard of before who may have written thirteen number one songs. You can make a great living as a songwriter. I became very inspired when I came to Nashville. It is Music City. The bus driver is also a guitar player, the taxi driver is a drummer, everyone here is a musician."

Val's latest CD, "No Place" was released in March of this year. Through working on the CD and unable to find a record company to release her music, Val forged her own path and along the way met the right people who were

able to put her on tour with Ted Nugent as his opening act over the summer. "A lot of people have told me that it's all luck to succeed in the music business," said Val. "I also think it's a certain amount of preparation that has to go into banking on getting lucky. You have to absolutely count on the idea that it is going to happen."

Val continues, "I spent two years in Nashville writing and recording my album, "No Place" before it was finally released. I am conscious of the way I approach things and wanted to have something I was proud of to use as my "calling card" to present to people, which was my CD. I felt confident about it. I took the music to record labels and was told that I had to choose my genre. It either had to be rock or country. I was told I could not stay in a gray area and try to be both. The business people were telling me that my songs were too edgy for country but then I was told it sounded "too country" to be rock. It was suggested that it would be better for me to consider a hard right or a hard left with the music. The business people do not understand the creativity or thinking outside of the box. They want to do what is safe for them so they can do their job. So, I put the CD out myself. I thought it would be an ideal opportunity that it could fit in either genre but unfortunately, the business people didn't see it that way. I took my CD to rock, country and classic rock radio stations and received air play from all of them!"

"That's why the CD is called, "No Place" because there was no specific place for it. To me it's rock and roll. Now a days, I don't know if it would be called rock and roll specifically but that's what it is to me," said Val. "One of my friends said that I have a grunge-country thing going on so he called my music "Gruntry!" I kind of adapted that genre for myself."

A chance evening turned out an audience member who provided the next step that Val would take in her music career. "I started tour-

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ing to showcase my CD at music festivals and so forth," said Val. "Less than two weeks after my CD was released I was in Waco, Texas in a tiny little bar doing a show for about 30 or 40 people. As it turned out Ted Nugent has a ranch just outside of Waco and one of his good friends was at my show that night. He went back and told Ted about me."

"After that I was doing a show in Los Angeles and Ted and his management came out to see me. I sang a few songs with Ted in the studio and then I was asked if I would like to open his concert tour over the summer for at least 40 dates! I said "Yes!" to the opportunity but felt overwhelmed inside because there was so much to get done in a short period of time. I had to secure a tour van, hire a band, get more CDs made, additional merchandise and fund raisers before the tour started but it was all worth it," said Val.

"I toured with Ted from June 16 through September 5 and each time I took the stage for those thirty minutes was heaven," said Val. The tour had its share of challenging times for Val when offstage drama took some time to settle. "Things on the road did hit a rough spot," recalls Val. "Our tour van was broken into and our gear was stolen. On top of that, the band that was traveling with me decided they had enough and took off with only a month left of the tour. Before the tour, I didn't really have enough time to audition people so through a friend of mine, there were three guys who were interested in doing the tour with me. We only had a week and a half to rehearse the material so during that time you can't really tell how it's going to be to travel with them, how they will

react to being under pressure and traveling in a van from city to city for a couple of months. It all started to unravel pretty quickly once we were on the road. Ted Nugent's crew wasn't happy with these guys and said those guys would never work for any of them. The music industry is small and everyone knows one another. The guys made themselves look bad by leaving and may have ruined their reputation. Thankfully, I was able to secure a replacement band who worked out even better. Actually, I was glad the whole thing happened."

On Saturday, December 18, Val will be the headlining act for "Rockin' Against Hunger" to benefit the Hunger Network of Greater Cleveland. The show will be at Wilbert's in downtown Cleveland. "I hope everyone will have a good time at the show," said Val. "That was something I learned from Ted while being on the road with him over the summer. He is a great performer and showed me that a concert is for EVERYONE. You need to play to the audience that is up front, in the middle, way in the back or up in the bleachers. You have to make the show enjoyable for everyone who is there."

Other acts that night include Stone Cold Killers and Death By Glue Gun. Donations for the Hunger Network will be taken at the door.

For more information about Val Halla, please visit: www.valhallaonline.com

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