

Ottawa Citizen
August 5, 2007

Who, you may be asking, is Gretchen Peters? Despite a decade-long career as a performer, she's better known — or maybe not known, considering writers' frequent anonymity — as the pen behind such 1990s hits as Martina McBride's powerhouse women's anthem "Independence Day" and Faith Hill's "The Secret of Life".

Peters' fifth album, due for release on Tuesday, will tune you in if she's not yet on your radar. If you're already a fan, it will reaffirm your musical wisdom.

The disc was born in part of Peters' divorce after 23 years of marriage. It's also rooted in a new love, making *Burnt Toast & Offerings* an exercise in push and pull that's anything but easy on the listener.

Not for Peters, whose sound blends country and folk and a splash of giddy pop, those generic Nashville sentiments about relationships. The opening track "Ghost" is total immersion in the drifting, sad days of a woman awaiting release from her oblivious partner. The next cut, "Sunday Morning (Up and Down My Street)", finds the singer swept up in the delirium of new love and life, as bright-eyed as is Joni Mitchell in *Chelsea Morning*. Then, in "Summer People", Peters introduces us to a bitter, loveforsaken waitress whose days and nights are a grim round of cigarettes and top 40 radio.

There's even an unexpected and quite successful cover of the old Johnny Mercer/Harold Arlen latenight bar tune "One For My Baby". And so it goes. Yin and yang. Life, in other words, as real and vibrant and often painful as what we've each known but can't usually articulate. Peters exits this fine album with "To Say Goodbye". The song, peopled by playing children and ghosts and shooting stars, sketches a disintegrating couple in their final, torturous moments. "We are strangers in the making/But we're not ready to say goodbye," sings Peters, walking that unravelling tightrope over inevitability.