

EMM GRYNERS
ONLY *of* EARTH

Inspired by the birth of a child and the death of an icon, multiple Juno Award nominee and acclaimed singer/songwriter Emm Gryner began work on an ambitious musical project that may turn out to be one of the most important and compelling of her career – “Only of Earth”.

It came to be so much more than a concept album, as during the writing and recording process Gryner was buffeted by tragedy and loss which tested her resolve and injected a powerful visceral element into this new music.

“Days of Games” is the opening chapter of the epic trilogy of albums called “Only of Earth” and is based on an overarching original story currently being crafted by Gryner. These albums will be augmented by a series of literary works, including graphic novels, featuring the artwork of the exceptionally talented Nova Scotia artist Karen Baer, who has also done the design work for the Days of Games packaging.

Musically, “Days of Games” sees Gryner infusing the songs with crunching rock riffs, soaring vocals, powerhouse beats and layered synthesizers of the best of 1970s and 1980s rock and pop music – a marked departure from the more folk and roots inspired solo albums she has released over the past decade and a half. The compositions were created in a way that suited the musicians she worked with, particularly noted Winnipeg jazz guitarist, the late Greg Lowe, who himself channeled his childhood rock roots to create some amazing solos, riffs and runs.

The story on which the “Only of Earth” trilogy is based is a work in progress, but one that is already bearing formidably powerful results. It is a futuristic tale featuring a female protagonist, a farmer, and it follows her through seemingly insurmountable challenges in this dystopian, technologically advanced world. But it is so much more, as it is meant to be representative the real-life challenges faced by a woman in the modern age, who is trying to balance the roles of mother, partner and creator.

“In mid-life, quite by surprise, I was pushed to the edge. The story is inspired by birth, and death. But it also has themes of survival, independence, finding solace on earth and searching for love, inside ourselves, outside ourselves, wherever we can damn well find it,” said Gryner.

“And to present a story like this, I need science fiction to tell it because in some ways it is too much for normal language. And then everything that happened to me while I was making the album fuelled its energy.”

Being female, being an artist, being a mother – those inherent challenges are explored through the device of Gryner’s music and lyrics. The parallels between the story and Gryner’s own life were strong, as she endured some crushingly difficult experiences at the same time as she was writing and recording music for this album.

“Giving birth is like an out-of-body experience where your every part of you is morphing into a new shape to bring another person into the world. It means the death of independence, freedom, old habits, old pastimes. The new little human takes centre stage and you have a new role, and it’s a role peppered with joy, but also laced with confusion. It’s the role of caretaker of another being. It is massively frightening and drives many women to the edge – something I can identify with,” Gryner said.

"Only of Earth" began as an exploration of the difficulties of being a woman of a certain age in our culture, but the work soon became a way for Gryner to focus and find some relief as she battled through a painful marital breakdown, as well as the tragic loss of her friend and musical collaborator on this project, Winnipeg guitarist Greg Lowe, who died before it was finished. And, amid this epic project, Gryner also endured the passing of her musical hero David Bowie, with whom she toured as a member of his backing band for several years.

"I lost myself, I lost the person I loved. This happened while I was crafting this story. While I was making the album, the guitar player central to the project suddenly died. A beautiful, gentle man with the warmest guitar tone in the universe. I admired him so much and was truly as inspired by him. And tragically, unbeknownst to me he played on my songs while he was dying. I wrestle with that fact every day, and some of the lyrics are about him, some almost subconsciously predict the end," she said, adding that the loss of Bowie pushed Gryner to embrace aspects of herself, particularly her love of more aggressive rock sounds, tinged with the bombast of 1970s prog rock, that she grew up with.

"Bowie's death challenged me to be more daring with my music. It is more adventurous than I have ever been. The drums are big, the guitar solos are long, the synths are high in the mix, the singing has a sense of youthful abandon."

Lowe's playing on songs such as "Shadow Girl", "A Mission", "Whatever Wind", and particularly on "The Spark" are exceptional tributes to his masterful musicianship.

"With this record, and with Greg especially, instead of me writing songs and adding musicians to them, which is what I did before, this was a case of looking at who I wanted to work with and create some of the songs knowing that these people would play on them. So as much as the album was inspired by the story, it was also very inspired by the musicians who played on it," Gryner said, adding that the record also benefits from the contribution of David Rhodes (Kate Bush, Peter Gabriel) who sang and played guitar on the beautiful "Something Tells Me".

With this bold new chapter in her life and her career, Emm Gryner is embracing change and unshackling herself from some of her fears, insecurities and the expectations of others. It is a highly-anticipated addition to her already impressive musical pedigree, which stretches back more than two decades and nearly two dozen recordings.

She is also known internationally for her time spent in David Bowie's backing band, and more recently for her musical collaboration with Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield. Gryner arranged the music for a cover of Bowie's classic song, "Space Oddity", and performed on the track, accompanying Hadfield who was in orbit on the International Space Station in 2013.

"Only of Earth" will undoubtedly be embraced by those who already love and appreciate her distinctive voice and her songwriting prowess, and who will likely find common ground with many of the powerful sentiments and ideas that comprise this remarkable piece of musical art.

Co-produced by Emm Gryner and Frank Gryner, "Only of Earth: Days of Games" will be released worldwide on digital platforms and LP and CD May 3 on Dead Daisy Records. - *Jim Barber*

For more information, visit emmgyrner.com / grynerofficial@gmail.com