

A reviewer in *The Sun* recently described Catherine Feeny as having a voice 'that cures all the stresses of a troublesome day'. And it's certainly true that her naturally crystalline, folk-oriented sound is balm for an agitated mind. But listen to her lyrics more closely and you'll discover a refreshingly visceral undercurrent.

On her latest album, *Hurricane Glass*, Catherine's songs range from introspective musings to a stinging take on President Bush's Iraq campaign, without ever falling into the traps of earnest clichés.

The Feeny profile is about to be boosted by the inclusion of one of these tracks – the wistful, bright-eyed *Mr Blue* – on the soundtrack of the forthcoming Gwyneth Paltrow movie *Running With Scissors*, propelling Catherine to the fore of the current crop of highly-regarded female singer/songwriters.

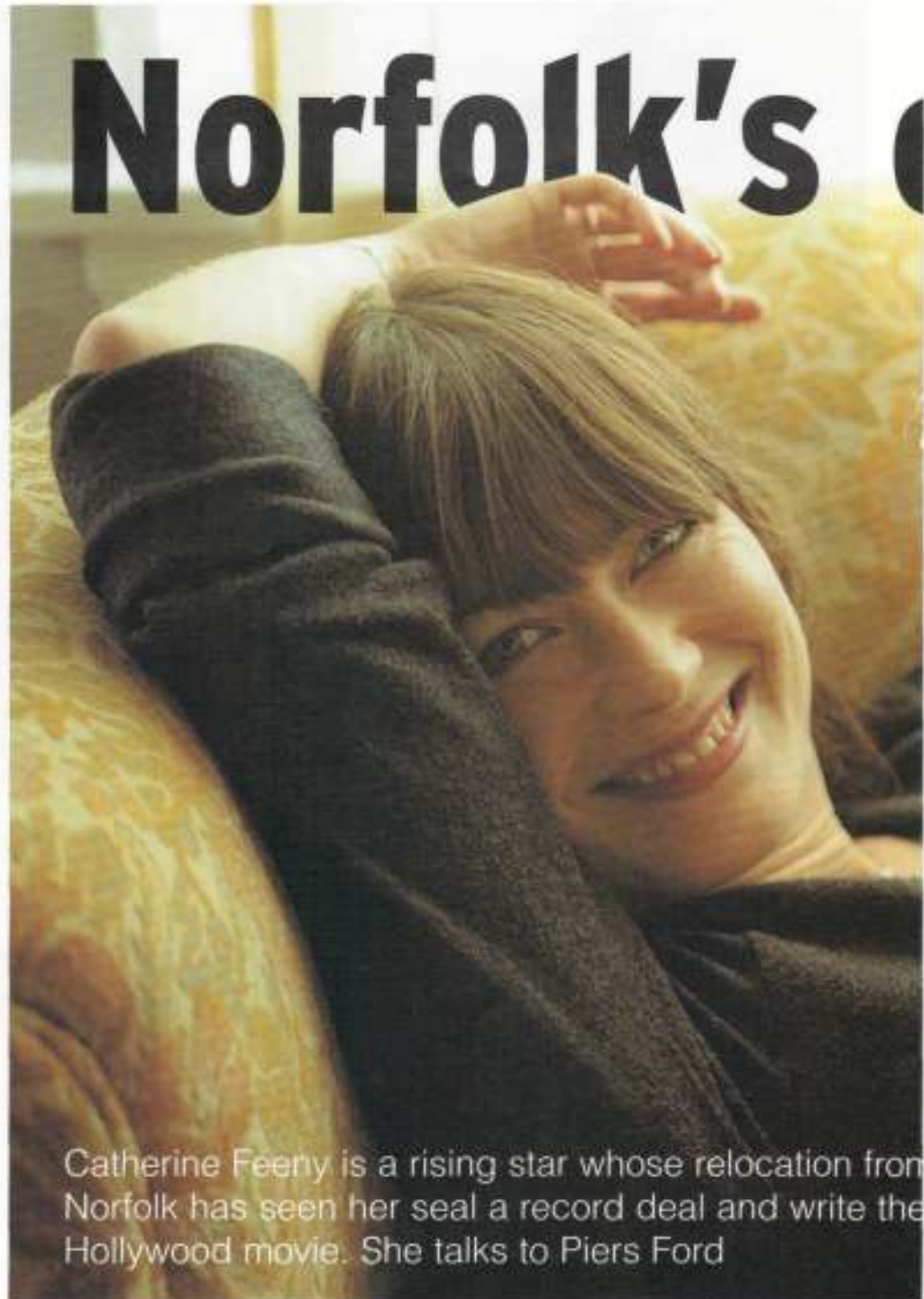
To her delight, excited friends in her native US have been calling to say they've seen her name in big letters on ads for the film in the *New York Times* and *Village Voice*. But Catherine has a pretty grounded view of how her career is evolving and critics' inevitable attempts to categorise her.

"Generally it is the media who decide who is part of any wave," she says. "I'd never look down my nose at being grouped with people like KT Tunstall or Niña Pastori. I'm honoured to be included with them, but it isn't something I could engineer. Music is like everything else that moves in phases or waves. Things go away and come back again.

"It just happens that the songwriter is prevalent in mainstream music just now, and it hasn't been that way for a while. The fact that there are some strong female songwriters is a reflection of that. But there are many more out there than the ones who get the attention and I wish there was even more opportunity for them. You still get a lot of eye-rolling when you talk about women singer/songwriters – that doesn't happen with men."

Catherine was born in Philadelphia and started her musical career proper in Los Angeles before a fateful meeting that would eventually bring her to Norwich, the city she now calls 'home'.

"A guy named Sebastian Rogers came to hear one of my shows and came back afterwards to say he'd like to work with me and produce me," she explains. The rapport was instant. Catherine came to Norfolk to sing on an album Rogers was making with Lighthouse Family lead singer Tunde



Catherine Feeny is a rising star whose relocation from Norfolk has seen her seal a record deal and write the Hollywood movie. She talks to Piers Ford

Baiweyu, and the pair started recording together on her own material. What began as an acoustic project kept growing, she says, and *Hurricane Glass* was the result. "The time I spent in Norfolk reflected the way the album was developing and over the process of making the album I really formed a family. I got a manager and a recording deal over here. We were recording at the Mill Studio in Winfarthing, and I loved being there out in the middle of the fields. Norwich is a small city and you can always expect to run into people

you know here. And I like its proximity to the country."

Catherine says the album is a meeting point for the respective strengths of her own approach to singing and Rogers' expertise as a producer.

"We come from very different places in that way, but we've found a way to meet in the middle," she continues. "I'm more folksy and I was very concerned that the album would sound real and uncluttered, whereas Sebastian has high production values. During the making of the album, we got to a place where we could combine them both."

This has been a busy year. She finished the album and toured extensively. Live

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Down songbird



Los Angeles to
soundtrack to a

performance remains central to her work. "I always loved to sing as a kid and I probably grabbed the spotlight at family gatherings, belting out songs like Dolly Parton's *Nine to Five*," she laughs. Growing up, she shed the influence of infectious country pop for more esoteric sources.

"I didn't come to Joni Mitchell until I was a little older," she says. "But I remember I was at university when I first saw Sinéad O'Connor, and there was an instant feeling of, 'OK, I could do something like that.' The fact that she was so bold and seemed fearless was appealing and I knew there were parts of me that didn't fit in with stereotypes, either."

Catherine says she enjoys recording and

performing equally. "They have such different rhythms and there are upsides and downsides to both," she points out. "It's nice to perform and be out in public, interacting with an audience. But if you're travelling for weeks at a time it can be very tiring. On the other hand, recording is such a fascinating, creative process, and your head can get sucked right into it. Then you need to get out into the world again!"

The third strand to her musical life – writing the songs – is a solitary occupation, says Catherine. She's already working on the next album, although she refuses to subject herself to any time pressure. "It's really important in my life for me to balance alone time and shared time. If you're too alone, you end up not having

enough things to write about!"

Touring is an inevitable aspect of a troubadour's life, and there is something about Catherine's work that resonates very strongly with the tradition of the storyteller constantly on the road, weaving tales in music for a growing audience.

"I've played in a variety of places but there's a lot more I could do," she says. "I'd like to visit France more, tour more extensively in the US and here in England. So I do think about that aspect of my career and talk about it with my manager and my booking agent. But my main priority is to make sure my artistic output maintains a high quality and that I still have something to bring to people."