

FISHER

"Raise the white flag and surrender to this life ...
Pour the whiskey, smell the roses, tell some
jokes -- laugh before you die."

-- "Surrender"

"I love your garbage. To touch it is to touch you."
-- "Your Biggest Fan"

Throw Fisher any bait, they're not gonna bite at just any conventional lure.

Kathy Fisher and Ron Wasserman (Fisher) have it made in a life that involves, but doesn't revolve around, music. After a dose of music industry madness they realized that what they loved about music was also potentially capable of destroying what they loved about life. Away from the noise and the schmooze of West Hollywood they've mastered the art of juggling musical projects, parenting their year-old son Aron, living joyously and somehow making it all work together.

While other bands were trying to stroll down the road well worn by the music industry only to find the path overgrown with thorns and bramble, Fisher was paving a new high-speed lane into the world wide web of Internet commerce. Three million people downloaded their single "I Will Love You" before most bands figured out there were other ways than brick-and-mortar to reach listeners.

Their paving efforts more than paid off for them on the road less traveled by. It earned them a buzz no publicist could dream up. Fisher was profiled in *Time*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *The Tonight Show*, and the *Los Angeles Times* as vanguards of the digital music revolution.

Intuitively, they knew they could build a fan base on their own using the web and other non-industry affiliated publicity such as TV and radio. They're a popular choice for commercial endeavors requiring music for advertisement. Even now, you're hearing them every day, celebrating their "Beautiful Life" in a national Toyota ad campaign.

The Lovely Years

From the joy of "Beautiful Life" through the wonder of watching a spectacular meteor shower one magic night on "Sleepy Head," the nostalgia of "The Lovely Years," the delicate intimacy of "You," the gauzy romance of Kathy's duet with label mate Ben Taylor on "So Much," even the twisted ironies of "Your Biggest Fan"-- from all these tracks, something real seems to rise.

A representation of what it means to Fisher to have a successful life with music, not because of it.

It's a typical day in the Fisher-Wasserman home. Snow covers the ground beneath stands of pinion pines and redwoods that circle them for nearly seventy miles. In the space of twenty-four hours Kathy will run their cat to the vet and back -- that's an hour each way which will cut into her writing, business, and play time with Aron.

Ron, who finished mastering *The Lovely Years* yesterday, has stayed up until two in the morning to finish a commercial assignment. Now he will work through the afternoon on music for a children's show. He's in the guesthouse a mile away, at his studio; outside Mt. Pinos looms against a darkening sky as evening falls.

Here in this wilderness Ron and Kathy have built a modern life. The details each day are unpredictable at best: hour-long drives through the woods to the nearest Fed Ex station; quick runs to the store for forgotten milk and toiletries, a winter coat thrown over pajamas and boots; an hour in local gym claustrophobia, working on mixes from treadmills and triceps nautilus. The bigger picture doesn't change though: These days, it's about living to the fullest and translating that inspiration to tape.

"When we had Aron, it made Ron and me want to focus on the positive," Kathy says. "We never want to sound like Pollyanna, and we don't sugar-coat everything we say. But we realized that looking at the glass as half full was essential, almost like a survival thing."

"Positive" is a loaded word, though. In Fisher-speak, it means an immersion into the streams of experience, the icy water as well as the warm. "You have songs here like 'So Much' and 'Turn Around,' which are about the stresses you feel even during this lovely time," Kathy says. "It's not one-dimensional; it's more like a roller coaster, where the problems can seem as big as the payoffs."

By that definition, Fisher has never strayed from a positive path -- "though not always by choice," Ron laughs. When they met ten years ago they were already showing plenty of initiative -- and, to be fair, a little quirkiness -- on their own. Raised in the San Fernando Valley outside of L.A., Ron started taking piano lessons at four; before he turned six he had written some original keyboard exercises, which were later published and sold commercially. In school he cut classes to spend the day playing piano in the auditorium. In spite of that he graduated at sixteen and began studying photography at the California Institute of the Arts; this time, when he reverted to his habit of truancy and piano practice, the school was less understanding, and soon Ron left to start a band, Betty Boop and the Beats.

Meanwhile, in a tiny West Virginia town, Kathy was growing up surrounded by blue-collar families and country music. She was an independent kid who won poetry awards and

stirred up a little controversy in English class, where instead of turning in a poem written, as assigned, in different traditional structures, she delivered a screed on why no real poet would smother a good idea in the stranglehold of structure. She was thirteen when she first sang onstage with a band, and sixteen when she started wailing Pat Benatar and Pretenders covers at bars where Emmylou Harris was still considered edgy. Eventually she hit the road for L.A. and started scoring up day jobs with a résumé that included student, rock & roll musician, and nude art model among her areas of expertise.

When Kathy met Ron, he had a gig with the Saban animation company, whose most notorious product was *The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*. Though he was devoting eighty to ninety hours a week grinding out manic, high-metabolism music for the show, Ron had enough focus left to realize that the future would belong to him and Kathy together. "As soon as we started to see each other, we immediately started NOT seeing each other," Kathy remembers, "because I was working days and he was doing *The Power Rangers*, *X-Men*, and these other shows at night. But we always knew that we'd stay together for the long haul and would have a family someday."

Inspired after their marathon conversation one night at Bob's Big Boy, Kathy wrote her first song, demoed it with her roommate's guitar and a cheap tape recorder, and gave it to Ron. They began writing together: He'd lay down an instrumental idea, she'd add lyrics, and they'd polish it into final form. Doing whatever they could to be heard, they gave their songs to friends who were making student or low-budget films. Success didn't strike like lightning; it took creative, aggressive efforts for them to secure a spot on the second Lilith Fair tour, and even after taking the spotlight on the last night as soloist on "What's Goin' On" in front of a choir that included Sarah MacLachlan, Sinéad O'Connor, Liz Phair, and the Indigo Girls, Kathy found herself back at her secretarial day job a few days later.

Things changed with their first single. Long before the record industry caught on, Ron reasoned that exposure on the new mp3.com site couldn't hurt. Within the first week of posting "One"/"I Will Love You," seven visitors had downloaded their music; over time the number would explode to more than three million. As the first band signed on the basis of strong internet buzz, Fisher contracted with Farmclub/Interscope and performed on *The Tonight Show*, toured with Duncan Sheik and David Gray, and watched as 'I Will Love You' rose to the Top 10 callout lists at a number of radio stations. The song moved more than a few listeners to tears as they pulled to the side of the roads and phoned in to ask, "whose music is this?" ...

... then they had to watch as their label shut down. Shaking off dismay, they released a double CD, *Uppers & Downers*, on their own Rawfish imprint in 2002. By this time they'd also raced onto the fast track for commercial work, writing and/or recording for Hyundai, Verizon, Nike, and other clients. During the last six months of 2004 alone, they cut three spots for Toyota, one of which appears in extended form as "Beautiful Life" on *The Lovely Years*. The crossover

effect on their band work represents another curve they've hit before the rest of the pack: "I can always tell when a commercial is doing well because I'll see our sales jump on amazon.com," says Kathy. "Even though our names aren't mentioned on these commercials, and there's no promotion or press, listeners will go to ad sites and message boards to find out who we are, which shows me how much they care."

It's a sign of the times when listeners take this kind of initiative; it's a tribute to **Fisher** that they've reciprocated by delivering *The Lovely Years*, an album based on portraying themselves with total candor. Thus, for example, the title track, born from a serious illness that Ron's father suffered -- and survived. "When he gave the music to me I could feel **sentimentality** in the melody and tone," Kathy says. "That took me back to thinking about my childhood. When I grew up in this small town I could run around until nine at night and no one was going to hurt me or kidnap me. The sad thing is that it isn't that simple anymore -- but the great thing is that we have this wonderful child now, and hopefully we can help him have even happier memories **throughout his life with us.**"

There's a similar story behind "Beautiful Life." Though written for Toyota, it grew from Ron's fatherly dreams for Aron. "Toyota had sent me notes and temp music," Ron laughs. "I was like, 'Fuck it, I'm writing something for us.' So I came up with something about my fantasy of taking Aron to Disneyland for the first time."

It comes down to this: *The Lovely Years* is a gesture of love and trust, extended by Fisher out to the world. No artist could offer a more significant gift; no listener -- no one who really hears -- could be untouched.

It's clear: These are ... *The Lovely Years*.

"Let's live another hundred years and meet here when the stars rain down again ..."

■ "Sleepy Head"

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