

REVIEW

Music Review: K.J. Denhert - *Lucky 7*

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One in a while, you come across a musician who so effectively cobbles together a wide range of styles so effortlessly you swear you've heard it somewhere before...but you can't quite put a finger on it.

New York City born and bred troubadour K.J. Denhert is one of those musicians.

Everyone looks for reference points when presented with an unfamiliar artist; for Denhert, she is a lot like [Bonnie Raitt](#) with a little less blues and a little more jazz. Or [Lizz Wright](#) with a little less gospel and a little more rock. Really, though, reference points don't do her proper justice as her hybrid of blues, jazz, r&b, urban folk, and funky pop makes her an original. Just in case you need a tidy description, however, Denhert herself has one at the ready: "urban folk-jazz."

The daughter of Granadan immigrants, Denhart picked up a guitar at an early age and pursued a music career when she became an adult, joining the all-girl rock group Fire. At the end of that six-year stint, she joined the company that makes Dannon Yogurt as a financial analyst and moved to Cleveland. She never did give up her dreams of being a full-time musician, though, quietly honing her skills before moving back to NYC to give it a go as a solo artist. Fiercely independent and not willing to compromise by waiting on the right record contract, Denhert started up her own record label, Mother Cyclone Records.

This week, Denhert comes out with her seventh release on her label, the almost-all originals collection *Lucky 7*, distributed by Motema Music. Once again, she is bringing out all the guns in her copious arsenal.

Denhert easily avoids the chaos that often comes with all the genre-referencing, though. *Lucky 7* stays coherent through trendless, non-nonsense production, "happy" rhythms, acoustic guitar-centered melodies and life-affirming lyrics.

K.J. counts [James Taylor](#), Joni Mitchell, and Simon and Garfunkel among her primary influences. Her unforced singing style roughly resembles Roberta Flack's.



Crafting tunes with her Martin 00XCAE guitars (which anchor every song on this album) keeps her from straying too far from these sources of inspiration, and her self-production insures that it's her vision carried out to perfection, not someone else's.

Years of honing her songwriting craft reveal a veteran sense of craftsmanship in Denhert's songs. She relies heavily on personal experiences to bring out

mostly positive messages and musings without ever being too preachy about it. The melodies usually make sensible matches the lyrics. Consistently solid tunes are even occasionally outstanding, such as the absolutely gorgeous ballad "Beautiful." Another gentle number, "Sad Song," echoes Taylor at his melancholy best; so much so, you can almost hear him singing it.

"He's Not Coming Home" draws it's opening chord progression from [Steely Dan](#), an explicit reference by Denhert. You can hear shadings of The Dan in several of her other songs, like the bluesy "I Got Time," or the light funk of "Little Problems," for instance.

Extra points are handed out for printing not only the lyrics and credits for each track on the CD sleeve, but also for providing brief explanations for how each composition was conceived. It helps to get the listener even more involved with the music. Denhert may be going the "do it yourself" route with her records, but she doesn't cut corners.

I started out thinking it's a shame K.J. Denhart doesn't have a record contract. As I let *Lucky 7* soak in and discovered all the little things she did to make a solidly uncompromising but accessible record, I came to the conclusion that it's probably better this way. Denhert is free to make the kind of record her wide-ranging talents allow her to make.

They say that sometimes it's better to be lucky than good. *Lucky 7* is just plain good. That's the result of talent and hard work, not happenstance.

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