

talking with { Stacey D'Erasmus }

In a rock star's shoes

BY MARION WINIK
Special to Newsday

Stacey D'Erasmus's "Wonderland" (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, \$22) is a rock opera of a novel, tracking the comeback European tour of flame-haired, 44-year-old singer Anna Brundage. Once an indie sensation, Anna has emerged from seven years of silence with a new record, also called "Wonderland." The novel follows Anna's progress across Europe in first-person bursts as short as half a page. In addition to dispatches from Göteborg, Hamburg, Brussels, Perugia, etc., there are letters to Anna's sister, and flashbacks to the girls' childhood as daughters of a world-famous conceptual artist.

D'Erasmus spoke with Newsday at the start of her own "Wonderland" tour.

It takes a certain nerve to get inside the head of a rock star. Did you do any special research for this book?

I read a bunch of biographies and memoirs — Keith Richards, Juliana Hatfield, Dean Wareham — and I interviewed musicians. But the most important thing was going on tour with the Scissor Sisters in summer 2010. We have all these ideas about what goes on: partying, madness, bacchanalia, excess, all kinds of delicious things, but to be honest, I didn't see a lot of that. . . . People in the Scissor Sisters spent a lot of time reading.

What the trip really helped me to understand was the vertiginous day-to-day experience of a tour, what it's like going from city to city, what it's like doing soundcheck, what it's like coming off the stage, what it's like on the bus and the plane. It's a very particular and strange experience. It's not like going on vacation, like going to Europe on a sightseeing trip. There's actually a huge amount of downtime, of waiting around for the show that night.

A touring band is a family and a workplace at the same time, and you're living with people you didn't necessarily choose every day for up to a year. In Anna's case, her road manager hired all the players, but they're all living together day and night. When Anna

becomes lovers with the bassist, it's like, of course.

Anna's encounters with men are an interesting counterpoint to the conventional male rock star scenario.

Right — it's not that cliché of the guy looking into the crowd, picking out three people to sleep with and having them brought backstage. Anna is the star, and she's a free modern woman, but what she's doing is not that different from what anyone else does. There are a couple of guys she picks up, one in Sweden and one in Berlin, plus her

bass player and an old lover. In rock star terms, that's not a lot.

Yet the brief encounters work for her — she takes energy from them.

Yeah, she likes it. In books, there's a cliché that one-night stands are awful for women, but that's just not true. She also has a past relationship with a married man that is still tweaking her, and moves into a second act.

Another theme of "Wonderland" is being the child of a famous artist. How does that fit in?

Though neither of my parents is an artist, I was really interested in what it's like to be an artist from a family of artists, how you find your voice. In this case, there's also the issue of translating between media. Anna has always wanted something that would be the equivalent of her father's cutting the train in half, something that powerful. But her father worked in literal physical mass, and she works in sound.

And you work in words. Among the other notable features of the prose are the descriptions of music. For example, "My sound was the sound of the gap, the place where the seams show, where your fate feels like it's quietly rotting inside your head . . . [it] sounded simultaneously like a dress slipping off a bare shoulder and a girl falling down a well."

I'm not a musician, I couldn't carry a tune in a bucket, so part of it was that I didn't want to make a fool of myself. I thought of it as transposing the sounds I was hearing in my head into a different register.

It's a kind of synesthesia, I think. But for those who would like some music with their metaphors, "Wonderland" comes with a Spotify playlist of 42 songs, from X-Ray Spex to Fleetwood Mac.

D'Erasmus toured with the Scissor Sisters while researching for the book.

D'Erasmus traces a singer's steps during a comeback tour in "Wonderland"



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bestsellers

Publishers Weekly's U.S. list powered by Nielsen BookScan for the week ending May 4. Latest list: newsday.com/books

hardcover

FICTION

1. **THE TARGET**, by David Baldacci (Grand Central)
2. **NATCHEZ BURNING**, by Greg Iles (William Morrow)
3. **THE COLLECTOR**, by Nora Roberts (Putnam)
4. **THE GOLDFINCH**, by Donna Tartt (Little, Brown)
5. **CHESTNUT STREET**, by Maeve Binchy (Knopf)
6. **I'VE GOT YOU UNDER MY SKIN**, by Mary Higgins Clark (Simon & Schuster)
7. **LIVE TO SEE TOMORROW**, by Iris Johansen (St. Martin's)
8. **NYPD RED 2**, by James Patterson and Marshall Karp (Little, Brown)
9. **THE INVENTION OF WINGS**, by Sue Monk Kidd (Viking)
10. **BRIDGE TO HAVEN**, by Francine Rivers (Tyndale)

NONFICTION

1. **EVERYBODY'S GOT SOMETHING**, by Robin Roberts (Grand Central)
2. **CAPITAL IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**, by Thomas Piketty (Harvard/Belknap)
3. **A FIGHTING CHANCE**, by Elizabeth Warren (Metropolitan)
4. **FLASH BOYS**, by Michael Lewis (W.W. Norton)
5. **LET'S JUST SAY IT WASN'T PRETTY**, by Diane Keaton (Random House)
6. **GRAIN BRAIN**, by David Perlmutter (Little, Brown)
7. **SMART MONEY SMART KIDS**, by Dave Ramsey (Lampo Press)
8. **OPTIMAL LIVING 360**, by Sanjay Jain (Greenleaf)
9. **KILLING JESUS**, by Bill O'Reilly and Martin Dugard (Henry Holt)
10. **EVERYTHING I NEED TO KNOW I LEARNED . . .**, by Diane Muldrow (Golden Books)

paperback

1. **GONE GIRL**, by Gillian Flynn (Broadway Books)
2. **HEAVEN IS FOR REAL**, by Todd Burpo (Thomas Nelson)
3. **GONE**, by James Patterson and Michael Ledwidge (Grand Central)
4. **SHADOW SPELL**, by Nora Roberts (Berkley)
5. **WHISKEY BEACH**, by Nora Roberts (Berkley)
6. **KING AND MAXWELL**, by David Baldacci (Grand Central)
7. **BEHIND THE BEAUTIFUL FOREVERS**, by Katherine Boo (Random House)
8. **THE CUCKOO'S CALLING**, by Robert Galbraith (L. B./Mulholland)
9. **FOUR BLOOD MOONS**, by John Hagee (Worthy)
10. **FOUR FRIENDS**, by Robyn Carr (Mira)