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In her own right

Shana Morrison makes her own musical name with a whirlwind of touring and recording.

by Tim Seyfert

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The road to success for any aspiring musician is rarely clear-cut.

When you are the daughter of a legendary rocker whose songs are adored by a multi-generational legion of fans throughout the world, the path can be even more difficult. For Shana Morrison, the only child of iconic singer-songwriter Van Morrison, the obstacles were taken in stride, and ultimately overcome by virtue of a unique voice and a seemingly inherent talent for penning soulful, thought-provoking songs. With three albums under her belt, as well as an active tour schedule that should keep her on the road for most of this summer with her band, Shana Morrison and Caledonia, Morrison, 33, appears to be becoming a distinguished and respected artist in her own right -- well outside of the looming shadow of "Van the Man." "I wouldn't compare myself to my father because so few people have, or ever will, achieve what he and other artists like Bob Dylan have," Morrison said during a phone interview from her Mill Valley home earlier this week. "Very few people get the opportunity to be able to make albums and tour for something like 40 years. Although that's nice, my goals aren't exactly along those lines." For now, Morrison, whose sound has been described as everything from "adult alternative" to "soulful blues rock," said happiness can be defined simply by making the kind of music she wants and sharing her tunes with as many ears as will listen. Though music is both her passion and full-time job these days, the notion of music as a profession wasn't something Morrison saw in her future. Growing up in Marin County as the child of two full-time songwriters, Morrison admitted to developing a slight disdain for the industry early on. "Both my father and my mother (Janet Minto, aka "Janet Planet," who was the subject of many of Van Morrison's love songs) were in the music industry, and honestly, it wasn't something that really appealed to me," Morrison said. "I used to see them work and struggle so hard, and I realized that it just wasn't a very stable way of life in terms of hours and performing and getting a paycheck, so I became attracted to a more practical route." After her parents separated in the late '80s, Morrison (whose first name rhymes with "Dana") spent her teenage years living with her mother in Los Angeles. She was later accepted into



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Pepperdine University in Malibu, where she decided to pursue a degree in business administration. Though she spent the bulk of her efforts preparing for a "practical" future, Morrison found herself writing songs in secret as a means of artistic release from her math-riddled business classes. Morrison, who found solace as a child by listening to old blues albums in her grandparents' record store in Fairfax, said songwriting seemed like a natural way to balance her mind. "I would spend so much time in the library using one part of my brain; I would just feel like I needed to use the rest of my mind as well," she said. Finally, after graduation in 1994, with no job prospects in sight, Morrison took up an offer to go on tour with her dad and sing back-up and duets with her father's band. The notion of going on tour seemed like a welcome break from the college grind. Little did she realize that, once out on the road, the young Morrison would soon turn her hidden passion for music into a life-altering reality. "I had sung in choirs growing up, but it wasn't until (that tour) that I knew that's what I wanted to do full-time," she said. From there, Morrison was bent on a career in music. In 1995 she formed Shana Morrison and Caledonia, made up of other members of her native Marin County music scene. Since then, Morrison and her band have been recording and touring nonstop, releasing three albums: "Caledonia" and "Everybody's Angel" in 1999 and "7 Wishes" in 2002. A new as-yet untitled fourth album is currently in the works, Morrison said. After receiving a fair amount of critical acclaim for her studio work, Morrison then went on to open for such artists as Lyle Lovett, Joe Cocker and Michael MacDonald out on the road. She also was a featured act at numerous festivals around the world. Along with regular club and festival gigs, benefit concerts also became part of the touring schedule. Morrison said they're an essential part of her job. "Most people, if given the chance to do something to help others, would," she said. "I happen to be in a position to do something." This weekend, Shana Morrison and Caledonia will bring some of that good will to Palo Alto, performing at the Heart of Silicon Valley's Benefit for Emancipated Foster Youth tomorrow night from 4 to 7:30 pm at the Lucie Stern Center's Fire Circle Amphitheatre. Tickets range from \$35 to \$125, and all proceeds will go to charity. Morrison will spend the rest of the summer touring the West Coast, and plans to release her forthcoming album sometime thereafter. As for later on down the road, Morrison said she's fine taking each experience as it comes and plans to continue making music, whether it be for packed festival arenas or simply for herself. "I'd like to be able to look back (on my career) and know that I was able to get my music out to as many people as possible," she said. "I plan to just keep moving forward."

Who: Singer-songwriter Shana Morrison, performing at a Heart of Silicon Valley benefit concert.

Where: Fire Circle Amphitheater at the Lucie Stern Center, 1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto

When: Saturday from 4 to 7:30 p.m.

Cost: Tickets are \$35, \$75 or \$125 per person, based on ability to pay.
Buy them in advance at www.hosv.org or at the door as available.

Info: Go to www.hosv.org.

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