

Mraz's experiences haven't all been negative, however. "It's been a weird year," he said. "Very chill. We had a lot of downtime, which

he said. "It's frustrating. I played songs live from 'Mr. A-Z' long before we recorded the album, so by the time the album

is peppered with original and cover songs. She includes tunes by the likes of the Indigo Girls, Joni Mitchell, Melissa Etheridge, Sheryl Crow, Sarah McLachlan and others.

Oak. Doors open at 7 p.m. Show begins at 8 p.m. General admission tickets are \$30. Call 248-399-2980 or click www.royaloak-musictheatre.com.

BARRETT: DMAs are Thursday at the State Theatre

Continued from PAGE 1

The second track, "Millie & Joe," on Barrett's latest CD sprung from one of Lamb's songwriting assignments.

Barrett has also performed at Lamb's Songwriter Showcase, periodic shows featuring retreat alumni that the mentor holds on Sunday evenings at Memphis Smoke in Royal Oak.

Barrett also belongs to Songwriters Anonymous, a songwriting network similar to a writers group, with about 35 members — many of whom are alumni of Lamb's Songwriters Retreat.

There are as many songwriting techniques as songwriters, and Barrett has her own pattern.

"I usually start by playing some chords on the guitar, thinking about a melody," she said. "As I'm playing the melody, an idea comes along. I usually come up with the chorus first.

"Some songs I can write in an hour. It just comes to you and it's done. Other songs you try to refine and you set it down for a while. I call it 'the vault,' the songs you just play in the privacy of your closet."

Today, a Barrett performance

is peppered with original and cover songs. She includes tunes by the likes of the Indigo Girls, Joni Mitchell, Melissa Etheridge, Sheryl Crow, Sarah McLachlan and others.

"I play all those covers because I like them, not just because other people like them," Barrett said.

Her goal as a performer is simple. She wants to land more gigs and continue opening for better-known acts — a common-sense approach that probably stems from her position as a business analyst for Ford Motor Credit Co.

Barrett's goal as a singer-song-

writer, beyond getting better at creating tunes, isn't as concrete.

"If you still have something to say, if you still have something to express, you still write songs," Barrett said. You keep on keepin' on. There are times when I think, 'is this taking me anywhere?' But if people like it and are paying attention, you're doing a good job."

Barbara Barrett will perform 7:30-10 p.m. Saturday and June 10 at The Coffee Beanery, 28557 Woodward, Berkley. Her latest CD, "Listen to the Way," is available for \$12 at www.cd.baby.com and www.amazon.com. Check out her Web site at www.barbmusic.com.

WRENFIELDS: Will be at the Detroit Hoedown May 19

Continued from PAGE 1

was released the following year.

Both releases received favorable critical reviews, leading the band to open for such acts as Lorie Morgan and Darryl Worley. Novrocki said she's proud of the band's early efforts, but admits that she believes the band "hadn't found ourselves yet. I was happy with our first two albums, but was a little embarrassed by my songwriting. Fortunately, the country community in Detroit really supported us."

The group recently recorded their third album at the studio of Ed Ackerson in Minneapolis. Producing the album with Anderson is production partner Gary Louris of the Jayhawks. The pair also produced Sarah Lee Guthrie and Johnny Irion's critically acclaimed "Exploration" and a forthcoming Golden Smog release.

"This album can still be called alt-country," said O'Bryan. "It has pretty heartfelt lyrics and bits of both rock and country sounds.

"We all agreed that we would take a lot of direction from Gary and Ed before we went to Minneapolis," he continued. "We allowed them to guide the sound and where we ended up. They're our songs, but we went out there as a lump of coal and had Gary and Ed spend six weeks polishing our material."

The Wrenfields are shopping the album to both independent and major labels. O'Bryan compares the album's sound as ranging from Elvis Costello to country. "We're following our hearts in keeping the country spirit," said Novrocki. "But this album sounds more indie-pop than our previous recordings — I'd compare it to Wilco."

Novrocki said her new songs are more evolved than her previous efforts. "I'm still trying to find my voice. My new songs are more introspective and personal, sometimes embarrassingly personal. I wish I could write like John, because he writes stories, but I really wanted to explore spirituality in my songs, including both Eastern philosophy and Western religion themes."

Novrocki's "First Step" from the new album is a step in this direction. "It's a song about how everything is energy," she said. "What you picture your future in your mind can become reality. You can't explain it, it just happens. It's really heavy on pedal steel, which helps put the twang in the indie-rock sound of the song."

The most country-sounding song on the new album, according to Novrocki, is the Pyro-

penned "Rhinestone Rodeo," a song she claims should be released as a single. "I think it'd be a good song to pole-dance to," she giggled.

If mildly embarrassed by her efforts on the group's first two releases, Novrocki said that she's "honestly very proud of this album. I can't wait until it's released," she said. "I'm proud of my songs, and proud of John's songs. It's gonna rock."

The Wrenfields perform Tuesday with Stewart Francke and the Regular Boys in a WCSX Over Easy concert at Mark Ridley's Comedy Castle, 269 E. Fourth Street, Royal Oak, 248-542-9900. Doors open at 7 p.m. and the show begins at 7:30 p.m. General admission tickets are \$7. The Wrenfields also open the WYCD Downtown Hoedown at 3 p.m. Friday, May 19 at Hart Plaza in Detroit. Admission is free. For information, click www.wycdhoedown.com.



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