

Daughter of Jerry Berry & Opal Mathews  
Granddaughter of John H. Berry Jr. & Maxine Norman Berry  
Great-granddaughter of John H. Berry Sr. & Mabel Porter Berry  
Great-great-granddaughter of Isaac Berry & Lucy Millard Berry

# MORNING SUN

Mt.

## Pleasant native works on career in music

By Steve Coon

Sun Managing Editor



With a soft speaking voice, quick smile and petite stature, Monique Berry's outward appearance gives little clue as to what lies inside. That would be a starkly confessional singer-songwriter, with a strong, soulful voice.

"Singing is an outlet," said Berry, a Mt. Pleasant native and 1986 graduate of Mt. Pleasant High School. "My vocals are very personal and candid, they're literal, if anything. I've kind of had an overly hard time expressing myself to people but I can sit and write a song about it, and express myself vocally."

It's a sort of transformation of personality.

"I think my singing voice is much deeper," she said. "I hear this all the time. I'm shy by nature, but I can sing in front of thousands and thousands of people and feel comfortable."

Berry, 39, expresses her feelings over 10 songs on her recently finished third album, "I Won't Pretend." The disc features one song, "Lincoln Street," that recalls a home where she once lived in Mt. Pleasant with her mother, Opal Mathews.

She said she didn't sit down intending to write the song about her old house. But her songwriting style is a little unusual. She simply sits down at the piano and starts playing and singing and sees what comes out. "I never have any preconceived notions or necessarily what I'm feeling," she said. "I sit down at the piano and whatever chord or

whatever sound comes out kind of dictates the way the song's going to go. "The song 'Lincoln Street,' the entire song kind of tells the story of living with my mom on Lincoln Street."

She said bearing her soul to the world through her lyrics is both freeing and difficult.

"It's extremely freeing," she said. "My lyrics are very candid and very truthful, but it's challenging for me, because I'm a very private person, to express my innermost feelings and tell everyone what I'm thinking and how I'm feeling. It's very difficult to put it all out there."

For "I Won't Pretend," Berry recruited an old friend from Mt. Pleasant, guitarist Pete Kehoe, who now lives in Petoskey. Kehoe flew out to California for three or four sessions.

It was another old friend from Mt. Pleasant who helped start Berry down the path of her musical journey. In 1988, she got a call from Bobby Zolty, a friend from high school, who said she had to come out to California and attend Musicians Institute.

Berry went, and has lived there ever since. In addition to performing live in California, she has recorded voice-overs for companies such as Mattel and Coca-Cola. Over the years, she has released two other CDs – the self-titled "Monique Berry" and "Waking Up."

This latest CD took a year-and-a-half to complete, and has a clean, simple uncluttered sound, adding emphasis to the personal nature of the vocals.

"I worked very diligently to find the right piano sound, and the right vocal sound for each song," she said. "I kind of wanted to get back to a time when you could actually pick out there instruments ... it was very important to have a lot of clarity and hear each instrument be defined." "I start and everything is way too overproduced ... I try to strip it all down, so it's as simple as possible."

"I Won't Pretend" is not yet available for purchase, as Berry is seeking a deal with a major music label. She said three are interested in signing her, and she hopes to have a deal in place by the beginning of summer. Some of the songs are available right now to listen to on her MySpace page, [www.myspace.com/moniqueberry](http://www.myspace.com/moniqueberry). Berry also has a Web site, [moniqueberry.com](http://moniqueberry.com)

She is planning a nationwide tour behind the album with a band that will include Kehoe.

Berry's first two albums were released independent of the major labels, and while she said that gives her some more control, she lacked the promotional muscle that major labels have. Signing with a major would expose her music to a much wider audience.

"I've never really needed or wanted to be on a label, so to speak, but it opens up a lot of things as far as promotions,"she said. While in Mt. Pleasant last week, Berry made it a point to treat herself to something that is unavailable in her southern California stomping grounds – a coney dog from the Pixie. While there are plenty of hot dog stops in California, she said none comes close to the coneys from the Pixie.

"I've been a vegetarian for about a month and I said 'As soon as I get home that's going to change,' and last night I enjoyed a coney dog."

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