

# Standout high school athlete turned singer-songwriter returns home for gigs

By [Brent Hallenbeck, Free Press Staff Writer](#) • Thursday, May 20, 2010

Even though she was a three-sport star at Proctor High School — she played basketball, won state championships in track and field and made the Vermont All-State soccer squad as a senior in 1999 — Caitlin Canty still found time for music. She played trombone in the school band and sang in the chorus.

“I had a lot of extra energy,” Canty said in a phone conversation last week from her current home in Manhattan. “I just remember really enjoying my time. I had a good class and some great teams and coaches so it ended up being pretty much the glory days, I guess.”

Canty acknowledged she can’t write a song about the glory days — Bruce Springsteen beat her to the punch — but songwriting is her thing now. The singer-songwriter who’s seeking musical glory days in New York City returns to her home state for shows Sunday, May 23 in Burlington and Tuesday, May 25 in Montpelier. She’ll be back June 18 to play a benefit with the “string-rock band” Darlingside for the newly renovated Brandon Town Hall Theater.

Canty makes acoustic music with bite, as reflected on “Neon Streets,” her new seven-song mini-album that’s the first in a series of four planned EPs. Her voice has a whispery quality a la Suzanne Vega that rises and falls over her acoustic-guitar work and the music of her backing group, Darlingside. Her lyrics on “Neon Streets” reflect both the toughness one needs to get by in New York (“Any guardian angel of mine/Has got to be missing some teeth” she sings on “Halo”) and the emotional toll the big city can take (“A bleeding heart can bleed dry/With so many sirens crying every night” is a key couplet from the title track). She even name-drops Vermont icon Ben & Jerry’s in the song “Two Hands.”

She played trombone in the Proctor High School band, but Canty’s path toward guitar-toting singer-songwriter began in her senior year when she received an acoustic guitar for Christmas. Though she favored listening to classic rock by the likes of Led Zeppelin and The Rolling Stones, Canty began playing acoustic songs by musicians such as Jewel and Ben Harper.

She majored in biology at Williams College but found herself more intrigued by the liberal-arts programs at the Massachusetts school, where she enrolled in a couple of songwriting classes. Deciding the more esoteric nature of the arts was more her thing than the exacting science of biology, Canty moved to New York City to pursue a career in music. She took a job with The Artists Den, a company that produces live shows in non-traditional venues such as a warehouse in Long Island City where she worked with the fast-rising indie-rock group The National.

That job required Canty to interact with established artists and learn about how the music business works — “or doesn’t work,” she joked — by dealing with lighting, production and high-quality audio and video equipment. The down side, she said, was that long days immersed in other people’s music left her too spent to create her own music. Her next “grand scheme,” she said, was to keep her creative juices fresh by working outside of the music business, so she took a job with a sustainability consulting company for awhile before quitting a year ago to pursue music full-time.

“For now it’s going great,” Canty said. “I’m able to tour all the time now. I couldn’t take gigs unless they were on the weekend or nearby before.” She’s doing her own promotion and management, which takes lots of time, and she isn’t making huge profits. “I’m just starting my new little business.”

All that work leaves little time for something Canty has loved forever — sports. She lives on the Upper East Side of Manhattan and goes for runs in Central Park, but that’s about the only sign of her Proctor High School athletic glory days.

“It’s kind of hard,” she said, “and I wish I had the outlet.”

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