

WINTER FESTIVAL



◆ NEW HOPE ◆ LAMBERTVILLE ◆

Award-winning singer/songwriter Danielia Cotton to perform at Lambertville-New Hope Winter Festival
By: Marshall Bell

Award-winning singer/songwriter Danielia Cotton certainly remembers her first performance in the Lambertville-New Hope area. She still remembers sitting on the stage at Havana's, when the emcee announced to the audience "She can't drink! But she can sing!" because Cotton was only 18 years old at the time and was performing her first of many New Years Eve shows in the area.

So when Cotton takes the stage at the Stephen J. Buck Memorial Theatre at New Hope-Solebury High School for the Lambertville-New Hope Winter Festival on Friday, Jan 29, her appreciation for the area will be showcased in her music, which she presents as bits and pieces of her life.

"I am who I am based on the life that I had here," said Cotton. "In many ways, I have a great and deep appreciation for the area because I think it gave me a lot too."

Cotton was raised by her single mother, Wenonah Brookes, in Hopewell, New Jersey. Growing up in a primarily white town such as Hopewell certainly had an effect on Cotton, whose mother is Black and father is Puerto-Rican, as well as her music. Her musical blend of Rock n' Roll and Soul tells the story of a young black girl who grew up in a primarily white town, but used trips to nearby New Hope for what she described as a musical haven because of its cultural diversity.

"New Hope was just a great place which seemed like anybody could go and everybody was accepted," she said.

Cotton grew up surrounded by music. Her mother was an eclectic hybrid of accountant by day, gospel singer by night, which exposed her to the music industry at a very young age.

"I remember sitting there and people would watch me as my mother was on stage," Cotton said. "Those people were such a huge part of my life."

She's certainly come a long way since then. Cotton has performed all over the world, opening for major acts like Bon Jovi, BB King, and the Allman Brothers. She will be performing at the Sundance Film Festival on Jan 25 in Park City, Utah, sharing the stage with well-known acts Leanne Rhimes and the Fray.

Her latest album, *Live Child*, has been nominated in the Live Performance Album Category in this year's Independent Music Awards.

So despite her success, Cotton still looks forward to her smaller, local performances. The Lambertville-New Hope Winter Festival committee approached Cotton about performing last summer and she was immediately excited by the opportunity to come home.

“As soon as I knew it was in New Hope, I loved it,” she said. “We’ve been touring a lot in the Midwest and other parts of the country, so we’re not usually home that close so it is going to be nice to be home.”

The Lambertville-New Hope Winter Festival is a weeklong event taking place from January 23-31.

Its ties with Cotton are many. *WXPN*, which is one of the festival’s sponsors, was the first radio station to play Cotton’s music. Cotton used to play at the restaurant Havana, which is involved in the Festival’s Chili Cook-off on Sunday, January 31 at Occasions in New Hope. But perhaps, most outstandingly, is Cotton’s support for charities like Fisherman’s Mark, which the Winter Festival has decided to benefit this year as well as other local non profits such as parks and recreation, schools, police and fire rescue. Fisherman’s Mark is a non-profit organization based out of Lambertville which supports struggling families in the area who Cotton not only identifies with in her childhood, but whose pain and struggle is a constant theme in her music.

“I’ve walked in those shoes,” Cotton said. “If you can perform and take them out of a place where they’re worrying about paying rent and everything else, that’s a good thing.”

Cotton has always taken pride in the fact that her live performances are very different from her studio albums. Her ability to feed off the energy of her audience is the reason so many famous acts have asked her to open for them. Her music has become a temporary respite of Rock N’ Roll, served by a tenacious Black-Puerto-Rican woman who knows she has a story to tell.

“That’s the great thing about live music,” Cotton said. “Sometimes the story might ring true to someone else and they realize they’re not the only one who feels this way. It’s just a great escape.”

To hear Cotton’s story, purchase tickets for her performance and all other Winter Festival events, visit the Festival’s website www.winterfestival.net.