

— SINCE 1888 —

## In the Long Run, San Diego Lawyer Decides to Face the Music

By Pat Broderick  
Daily Journal Staff Writer

SAN DIEGO — Pounding away at a 26.2-mile marathon in Carlsbad two years ago, San Diego lawyer Laura Roppé's next challenge suddenly became clear.

"I ran every step, and it changed my life," said Roppé, seated at a Starbucks in downtown San Diego. "It rearranged the gray matter in my brain, and what had been impossible was possible."

After the race, she took a quick shower, had a bite to eat, sat down with a yellow legal pad and made a list of what she wanted to accomplish in life. No. 1: "I want to sing in a band."

A drama major at UCLA, where she graduated in 1991, Roppé had acted in numerous stage productions, including a one-woman show and wrote an original one-act play that was chosen for full production. But Roppé, a partner in San Diego's Tatro & Zamoyski, had never performed in a band.

A search of the Net brought her to a local band called Cool Band Luke, which she contacted and made plans to send a demo.

Before she knew it, Roppé, 37, was the lead singer, belting out cover tunes from such artists as Janis Joplin, Blondie and Led Zeppelin.

"When she gets her mind on something, watch out," said Jann Hoff, who plays bass in Cool Band Luke. "There is no stopping her. She can bring 150 people out to a band gig in a heartbeat."

These days, Roppé juggles a musical career that is heating up, her legal practice, focusing on employment counseling and business litigation, mostly on the civil defense side, and a family that includes husband, Brad, and daughters Sophie, 8, and Chloe, 5.

Another foot race made Roppé kick her career into higher gear as a singer/songwriter. Training for the Rock 'n' Roll Marathon in 2007, inspired her to compile her own CD, "Girl Like This" — songs that she both wrote and performed, ranging from honky-tonk country and soulful ballads to folk, inspired by the likes of Carly Simon and Shania Twain.

"I was out there alone running to the sound of my own feet," she said. "They made beats, and I'd go home and type out the lyrics and sing on my digital recorder."

But she didn't play any instruments, so she tapped into the talents of her cousin in Seal Beach, Matthew Embree, singer of the progressive rock band RxBandits, who helped her put together another demo.

Roppé went back on the Web and contacted Grammy-nominated producer Steve Wetherbee at his Golden Track Studio in Escondido, who helped her bring it all together with the help of seasoned studio musicians.

"I get a lot of people who think they're going to be the next whatever," he mused.

In Roppé's case, Wetherbee was enthusiastic.

"I was listening to the words, envisioning what they would sound like," he said. "Lyrically, they are relatable to a lot of working women — a market that hasn't been filled enough. I really like 'Mama Needs a Girl's Night Out.' How many women relate to those words? If she gets 5 percent to download it, she could retire."

Recording that cut got a little raucous, with Roppé's friends sipping champagne and singing backup.



ROB SPRINGER / for the Daily Journal

After finishing a marathon two years ago, San Diego lawyer Laura Roppé set out to accomplish her next goal: singing in a band.

# Lawyer Revels in Facing the Music

"Here I was, one guy with 50 women who were a little tipsy," he laughed. "I am really happy for her. Laura could have some major success."

Roppé's big moment came in early August, thanks to a chance encounter in a parking lot with Little Tommy, the producer of 94.1 FM's popular "Jeff & Jer" show.

"I gave him my CD and asked him to listen to it," Roppé said, never one to pass up an opportunity.

The next day, he called, explaining that Jeff & Jer were about to play one of her songs, "Float Away" — a song that neither had heard yet.

"They read the liner notes, and played this graduation-type background music," she said, "and they made fun of me for all of the thank you's. I'm about to die."

Then, they played her song, and "everything changed," Roppé recalled.

"I got hundreds and hundreds of e-mails," Roppé said. "I didn't know that I could touch people in that way. It hadn't happened in writing legal briefs."

The listener response was so good, that Jeff & Jer ended up playing four of her songs on the radio that day, as well as interviewing her on air.

"Laura's song, 'Float Away,' is a song that many of our listeners and close friends can relate to," Little Tommy said in an e-mail.

On Aug. 13, Roppé debuted her CD at the Belly Up Tavern in Solana Beach, a fete attended by some of her new radio fans.

Momentum was building and Roppé was invited to sing at a Jeff & Jer party Aug. 22, performing before an audience of about 3,000 in downtown San Diego.

"I felt like I woke up in somebody else's body without an instruction book," she said.

Then, as Roppé sang "Float Away," members of the audience started singing along with her.

"That level of human connection, with them singing back to me, was the best feeling," Roppé said.

Little Tommy observed, "Watching Laura for the first time at our station party, I was looking into the crowd and everyone was smiling," he said. "You have to have a certain 'thing' that makes people smile and root you on. Laura is definitely a crowd favorite."

Her musical quest, which includes CD cover art by photographer Bil Zelman, whose clients include Virgin Records and Sony Music, hasn't been cheap. Roppé figures that she has invested about \$45,000 getting to this point.

## Time to Put Those Skinny Jeans On

Here are the lyrics to Laura Roppé's "Mama Needs a Girl's Night Out":

She was up four times in the night with baby.

Can't think clearly to save her life.

Laundry piling up is downright dreary.

And the older one's begging for a pony ride.

There's only one thing to do, if she wants to stay sane.

She calls up her girlfriends all with babies on the brain.

Put your kids to bed, get your skinny jeans on.

Bust me outta here, cuz I'm so far gone.

Moms gone wild.

Mama needs a girl's night out!

Moms gone wild.

Lord knows she loves her child.

But Mama needs a girl's night out!

She's cutting up their food at dinner time.

Clipping coupons on Sunday cuz she's saving every dime.

Husband off to work, two ships in the night.

No time for nothing, cept hello and goodbye.

She sees dirty diapers when she closes her eyes.

The older ones crying cuz she dropped her French fries.

Get out the high heels and perfume.

Buckle up, girlfriend, gonna howl at the moon.

"But, it's the best money I ever spent," she said. "It was a huge leap of faith."

It seems to be paying off. A runner-up in country star Kenny Chesney's "Next Big Star" competition in May, Roppé has her own Laura Roppé band, two popular music videos on the Web, and fans not only stateside, but on radio stations throughout Europe, too. Her high-energy single, "Mama Needs a Girl's Night Out," has been selected for RPW Records' "Violet Femmes, Volume 2," a CD compilation featuring emerging female artists from around the world. Her country ditty, "Fly Fly Fly," was selected for inclusion in

an indie-artist CD compilation in Australia.

And blogger and music critic "Wildy's World" wrote, "Roppé unleashes a tidal wave of color and emotion that transcends her genre and raises her to a level that has legs far beyond the bounds of Nashville."

Her colleagues in law aren't a bit surprised by her metamorphosis, including her two law partners and former classmates at the University of San Diego School of Law, where she graduated in 1995 magna cum laude and second in her class.

"She is a fantastic attorney, and she has this energy level and enthusiasm that goes through the roof, because she is an artist, too," said Peter Zamoyksi, a founding partner in the Del Mar law firm.

He and his partner, Tim Tatro, are happy to accommodate her dual careers.

"I can tell that Laura is really happy right now, enjoying the fact that she has discovered a way to reach out to so many people," Tatro said. "She has the courage to go out on a limb and try something different. We hope to be roadies on her North American tour."

Roppé previously worked for Janice P. Brown, founder of the San Diego-based Brown Law Group, whom she has known for more than a decade. But with her musical career heating up, Roppé decided that it was time to move on and left to join her former classmates in August 2007.

"It was hard for her to leave and go to another firm and do music, and hard for me to have her leave," Brown said. "But we both recognized it was in her interest to do that. It got to the point that she outgrew what I could teach, and she needed to do her own thing. She's doing that, and it's awesome. I hope that she becomes a national superstar."

Husband Brad, a former attorney and now president of the Carlsbad office of Lee & Associates, a commercial real estate company, has been her major booster.

"It's a neat thing for me, to see her working that side of her brain," he said. "It's so touching to see the sentiment of people who have heard her music and how she's inspired them. You can get some of that in law, but usually you're just reaching your client. But, with music, it's so much broader, and you can touch people on so many different levels. And I get to watch this from a pretty good seat."

pat\_broderick@dailyjournal.com



TOM KURTZ / for the Daily Journal

Laura Roppé recorded her songs at producer Steve Wetherbee's Golden Track Studio in Escondido. Roppé's music was first played on the popular 94.1 FM show "Jeff & Jer" in San Diego.