

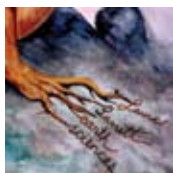


## LAURA BARRETT

INDIE SONGSTRESS PLAYS KALIMBA, CHANNELS WEIRD AL

by Bryan Borzykowski

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MOST MUSICIANS get their start playing high-school talent shows or maybe a friend's house party, but not Toronto musician Laura Barrett. Her first gig was a "Weird Al" Yankovic tribute show, where she played "Smells Like Nirvana."

"It's really interesting that Weird Al has achieved all the fame and success he has," says Barrett with a straight face. "It's like musical theatre; it's very entertaining."

Her affection for the king of polka parodies isn't surprising, considering Barrett's own unconventional career decisions. She doesn't play the guitar like most singer-songwriters; instead the songstress has adopted the kalimba as her instrument of choice.

This originally African instrument is basically a box with several metal keys that make sounds when plucked. It might seem a bit odd, but Barrett hasn't just mastered this quirky gadget, she's also written a brilliant batch of infectious tunes that rival anything a guitar-slinging songwriter

could muster up.

Her recently released EP, *Earth Sciences* (which includes her version of "Smells Like Nirvana"), is an intimate listen, with the focus solely on Barrett and her kalimba. "The songs are meditative," she says. "It's about what two voices can do together when one voice is human and the other is a bunch of metal raindrops."

Her debut full-length, which should be out in the fall, will feature a bigger sound with strings, vibraphone and Barrett's first love – the piano – all making appearances.

But for now, the eclectic artist is hammering her way through numerous live shows with only the kalimba in hand. Don't worry if you're a little taken aback by Barrett when you first see her play; she knows how unusual her set-up appears.

"People are slightly confused at the beginning – in a good way," she explains. "It's mystifying, but then they get into the sound and understand what it can do." ●