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Singer used music as physical therapy Melody Gardot's bedside sessions turned out to be worthy of EP release

Marke Andrews Vancouver Sun

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Four years ago, after her bicycle collided with a car, vocalist Melody Gardot lay in a Philadelphia hospital bed, her body shattered, her brain so damaged she lost all short-term memory, forgetting how to do the simplest of tasks.

"When I was hit, all the bridges that connect both cortexes of my brain effectively went out," says Gardot from her home in Philadelphia, where she had just returned from an extensive tour in Europe to promote her debut CD, *Worrisome Heart*.

"As far as daily functioning went -- brushing your teeth, brushing your hair, putting on your shoes, remembering what you had for breakfast, remembering how many pills you're supposed to take -- you could call me a humanoid defect. It was a real struggle."

As part of Gardot's physical therapy, her doctor recommended music as a form of treatment. Gardot's first instrument is piano, which she had played since childhood and, at the time of the accident, had been a source of income at restaurants and piano bars. Because of the damage to her pelvis, Gardot could no longer sit at a piano, and so she learned to play and compose with the guitar, lying flat on her back.

Very slowly, the music therapy brought her brain back to life.

"The thing that kept me from functioning was a cognitive impairment," says Gardot. "Music is one of the only things that helps rebuild neuro pathways in your brain."

"For me, music was just [therapy]. Listening to it, playing it, writing it, trying to remember any of it ... all those things together made for my ability to be somewhat better. It was slow, and even now I have very bad memory issues. They don't really go away."

From her bed at home, Gardot recorded a few original songs for the EP *Some Lessons: The Bedroom Sessions*. She didn't think highly of her musical efforts, but others disagreed.

"I only recorded [material] so I could remember it," says Gardot. "I had no intention of anybody listening to it, and honestly I was embarrassed to show it to anyone. Then a few friends came to listen and they encouraged me."

"From the beginning, this was music therapy, and it still is for me, just as any musician would say about writing or singing or performing. But to go beyond the cliché, it's what made it possible for me to have a normal, functioning life."

The EP opened career doors for her. Vancouver-based firm Macklam/Feldman Management, which handles Norah Jones, Diana Krall, Ry Cooder, Joni Mitchell and Elvis Costello, manages her career. Last year, she recorded her first full CD, *Worrisome Heart*, for big label Verve, which received rave reviews this spring. Life is good, despite the toll on her body.

Four years after the accident, Gardot still has physical disabilities. She wears dark glasses for her eyes. She must record day-to-day details in a journal to help jog her memory. She uses a cane, sits in a special chair on stage to alleviate damage to her pelvis, and uses a TENS machine to lessen pain. She has an assistant who helps her with physical therapy on the road.

"Everything I would need to do on a daily basis is multiplied by five because of how quickly you're moving and how much you're doing," she says. "But I'm blessed because I have really good people around me."

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