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Alumni Profile

Laura Davis
Linfield College

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Drawing connections, note by note

For Laura Gibson '01, there was no life-altering moment, no single big break. Only a steady progression of meaningful engagements which culminated in success.

"I never set out to be a professional singer-songwriter," Gibson admits with a shy smile. "But the next project always appealed to me, and then one day I realized, 'this is what I do for a living.'"

As a Linfield College science student and track and field athlete, Gibson first picked up a guitar at 20 when she was sidelined with an ankle surgery. She taught herself to strum a few chords and began writing songs.

"At the time, I was distraught at losing athletics," she recalls. "But looking back I'm so thankful that happened because I may not have had to sit still long enough to learn the guitar or found the need to express myself with song."

Encouraged by friends, she played in a basement here, at a party there, and eventually became a regular each Tuesday night at Our House of Portland, a residential care facility for people in the late stages of AIDS. The volunteer work was an important part of her growth and understanding of sharing her music. She recorded her first album in 2006, which led to touring and features on NPR and in *The New York Times*. Since then, there have been two additional records, and a year of touring in the U.S., Europe, Japan, Israel and South Africa.

"A tour forces you to live in the present," said Gibson, who has learned to carry her own herbal tea and slippers. "Every day is something different and it's really about the moment, that show and connecting with the people in that town. I really like that."

At home in the Portland neighborhood of Sellwood, she works from a 1962 Shasta trailer in her backyard, which she bought on Craigslist and remodeled with the help of friends.

"I'm not particularly handy, but trying to fix things, failing and trying again was amazing for my confidence," said Gibson.

She wrote songs for her recent "La Grande" album while sanding and hammering, and said the music reflects her understanding of self-confidence.

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Gibson entered Linfield planning to use a general science major as a step towards medical school. Though her career took a different tack, she developed discipline and a sense of wonder for the natural world during her hours in the chemistry lab. She enjoyed drawing connections among different classes such as chemistry, math, religious studies and psychology.

"The world isn't boxed up in different categories – it really connects," she said.

Like many artists, Gibson juggles various gigs. She spent a month as an artist-in-residence at Caldera Arts Center in Sisters, records music for commercials or film, and occasionally teaches songwriting workshops to adults and teenagers. She is featured in the "Cover Oregon" healthcare campaign, for which she wrote the demo song in her head while running errands to the library and bank, a day before leaving for Brazil. She's currently writing short stories, songs for her next album and collaborating with Portland author Cheryl Strayed on a writing and music project.

"There's so much more I want to do," said Gibson. "I'm fortunate and thankful. I've worked really hard, but at the same time I've had a lot of things go right and I'm extremely thankful for that." 🍀

– Laura Davis



At Linfield, folksinger Laura Gibson '01 learned communication and organization skills that have been crucial to both the creative and the business side of being an artist. "I remember walking through campus and thinking this is a magical place to come to school," she said.