

Condition forces singer to reflect on life

'Hunk of metal' won't hold back Millions' Allison

PEOPLE Profile

By Stacey McKenzie
Senior Reporter

Bright spotlights define Lori Allison as she floats across the stage, her hands saying nearly as much as her clarion voice does when she sings for The Millions.

On July 21, Allison saw a bright light like none she'd ever seen in her lifetime of singing and performing.

There was no audience to connect with beyond the light. She felt content and passive.

"It was very, very warm and bright. Extremely warm and bright. I couldn't see anything but bright light. I felt like I was watching something, but I never ended up seeing anything."

Luckily, Allison never saw anything beyond this light.

Medical personnel revived her before she got the chance.

"You were flatline for 80 seconds," medical personnel at Bryan Memorial Hospital told her.

Allison's heart had stopped during a test to check, as accurately as possible, her blood pressure and heart rate. Doctors were looking for the cause of Allison's recent fainting spells.

"A minute and 20 seconds," Allison said. "My heart stopped. They had to put adrenaline in my IV to make it start again."

For the test, Allison laid on a table that was tilted bit-by-bit until it reached a 60-degree angle. If a patient faints at that angle, there is a problem.

Allison did more than faint, she had no pulse at all. Eighty seconds is



Michelle Paulman/DN

Lori Allison of The Millions says she thinks about her mortality more now "or in a different way" after a near-death experience when her heart stopped for 80 seconds.

arecord — as far as her doctor knows. When she woke up, she was crying, and her head throbbed.

"And then (medical personnel) told me I needed a pacemaker, and I was very, very angry — very angry. I'm 26. I don't particularly like to do things to my body that aren't natural."

That afternoon, a pacemaker — squarish and slightly bigger than a silver dollar — was inserted under Allison's skin over her left pectoral muscle. She stayed in the hospital for four days.

Her hospitalization "did freak out the band," she said.

Band members told Allison not to worry about practicing and took nearly a two-month break.

Looking back, Allison said she had fainted twice when she was a child. But it wasn't until last year that the fainting spells became more frequent. They usually happened at night.

"I'd wake up, feel really weird, and then I'd disappear. And then I'd come back. Just very short, short things — not very long."

In January, as The Millions drove home from the Kansas City airport after a New Year's Eve gig in Las Vegas, Allison fainted — three times.

The spells each lasted 15 to 20 seconds, she said, "and that's the longest it ever happened."

The attacks looked like seizures to the band. No one could find her pulse. When the band pulled its van over,

she said, "I thought I was upside down."

"When your brain has the oxygen cut off long enough, your body can react in a seizure, and that's what my body did."

"So, when we got home, talking to the doctors, they decided that it was a seizure disorder — justly."

But the doctors were wrong. Allison has a rare condition called vaso depressor syncope, which means a nerve that should tell the heart to speed up instead is telling it to slow down.

A month after Allison got her pacemaker, she did another tilt-table test.

"And I didn't faint," she said. "It felt like I was going to, but it didn't

happen, and it was really weird, and it was great."

After about two months of recovery, Allison is back at it, rehearsing with the band about four times a week and working full-time at a health food store.

The Millions, a college-alternative group that saw flashes of stardom with its release "M is for MILLIONS," is working on a new demo tape and shopping around for a new record label.

"We're looking at everyone — in the world," she said. "And we really haven't heard anything yet, it takes a long time, though."

Despite what Allison calls the "hunk of metal" in her chest, she isn't holding back when she performs.

Her expressive style is still there. "I've got to kind of watch it and not overdo it. I totally am a spaz."

"After we played at Duffy's, I was totally sore. I totally overdid it."

Allison does not know what caused her condition.

"Maybe my body grew into this. It's nothing I could have prevented."

The pacemaker is unnatural, and somewhat of a nuisance. She has to have it checked about every three months. The pacemaker's battery might have to be replaced in seven years.

"I don't have to stay away from microwaves or anything like that, just arc welding and giant generators, like dams."

For all the troubles, the pacemaker is a lifesaver.

"That's the thing that freaks me out," she said. "Sometimes I just think, 'I rely on this for my life.' You know, I feel trapped by it sometimes. I have little panic attacks where my heart . . . I can feel it beating, and it just freaks me out."

"Hopefully I'll get used to it."

Seeing the bright light has made her question her mortality with more depth and frequency.

"Sometimes I wonder, 'Am I really supposed to be here, or not?'"

"There I am. I'm still here. And I should be."



Courtesy of RCA Records

Tyler Collins brings her soul/funk sound to her second album, "Tyler."

Collins combines past, present for successful second album

Reviews



Tyler Collins
"Tyler"
RCA Records

In 1990, Tyler Collins' debut LP, "Girls Nite Out," spawned the hit single, "Girls Nite Out," and now she is back with her second effort.

"Tyler" is Collins' attempt to prove she is just not a one-hit-wonder artist and is here to stay.

The first release from this album, "It Doesn't Matter," sounds more like a Wilson Phillips tune than it does a Tyler Collins song. This is probably

one of the weaker songs on "Tyler." "Pain" is a track that has a '70s sound. The slower tracks and the instrumentation — updated with the '90s rap style provided by Stetsasonic front man Daddy-O — makes this song appealing.

The sound Collins is aiming for works, partially because her voice is not particularly high. Her low voice blends well with the '70s funk style artists such as Sly Stone and George Clinton made popular.

When the '70s sound is paired with the sound of today, the result usually is a good product, and that is what Collins has done.

Collins does show she can step into

See TYLER on 7

Artist strives for perfect beauty as moonlighting plastic surgeon



Brian D'Amato
"Beauty"
Delacorte Press

By Sam Kepfield
Staff Reporter

What is beauty? And why do women claim it doesn't matter but still go to ridiculous extremes to look like all those anorexic models in Vogue or Glamour?

These are a few of the questions Brian D'Amato attempts to answer in "Beauty."

Jamie Angelo, the protagonist, is an artist who moonlights by performing a revolutionary form of plastic surgery using artificial skin.

He tries it out on famous actresses. He converts a homely wallflower into a superstar model.

His dabbling in creating beauty leads him, naturally, to create the Perfect Woman.

Angelo finds Jaishree, a struggling model, and persuades her to become his masterpiece. And she is, naturally, a hit with the fashion world.

Until the experiment goes wrong, polluted by one of Angelo's colleagues to get a monopoly on the process. He is forced to go on the run, racing toward an ironic and powerful ending.

For a first novel, D'Amato shows



Courtesy of Delacorte Press

Brian D'Amato's first novel, "Beauty," was released this month.

promise. But the pace of the book is uneven. Where it excels is with his describing the process, and Angelo's ruminations on beauty. The last 20 pages are gripping.

The middle sags, though, from sheer excess. If the reader is unfamiliar with New York City art or fashion worlds from the pages of the New Yorker or Vogue, then certain stretches

of the book will seem to be gratuitous name-dropping.

The reader may not even recognize the names, and skim over them like the polysyllabic monstrosities found in Russian novels.

However, if one can bear up through the wine and cheese parties, receptions and fashion shows, then the book is an entertaining read.