

The Oregonian

Star finds out how it feels to shine

Lyndee Mah breaks out of her usual nightclub orbit to take a turn in concert

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Lyndee Mah is a veteran Portland performer. And yet, she admits her concerts this weekend at The Old Church are her coming-out party, of sorts.

"I've done a lot of gigs and I've done a lot of performance," she says, referring to her work in both nightclubs and accompanying dance troupes. "But I've never really done a solo concert before."

Mah first made her name around town as a jazz singer, working with the likes of Ron Steen and Janice Scroggins. She toured with Quarterflash briefly, singing background alongside Linda Hornbuckle and Sandra Simmons, and for a time she stood at the center of local hipness as the original vocalist with Pink Martini. Although she's led her own bands before, this weekend's show puts all the focus on her as the starring attraction.

Reflecting her own eclectic background which has included jazz and classical studies, Mah has gathered an intriguing array of talents from Portland's musical community. Her collaborators include 3 Leg Torso, Fear No Music pianist Jeffrey Payne, vibrband innovator Stan Wood, Pink Martini vibraphonist Doug Smith, jazz/blues pianist Scroggins, ValGardena Bassist Jeff Leonard and super session drummer Greg Williams.

Along with that list of seasoned pros is guitarist Jamey Hampton, who Mah says will be making his debut as a performing musician. Hampton's hardly new to the Portland art scene – he choreographed last spring's Portland Opera version of "Carmina Burana." Mah is also part of the city's dance community, having sung for the Gregg Bielemeier Dance Project. So when Hampton decided to unveil his work as a

songwriter, he asked Mah to give voice to his songs.

Though it'd probably be fascinating, this cast of musicians won't all play at once. For the Hampton tunes, Mah will be backed by Leonard, Williams and Smith. Payne and Scroggins each will play duets with the singer. With Hampton, 3 Leg Torso's Courtney Von Drehle on accordion and Stan Wood on vibraband (a piece of dental dam rubber from which he coaxes sounds like Miles Davis' trumpet), Mah has devised a version of George Gershwin's "The Man I Love" with a novel twist. "That has a Tibetan swing to it," she says. "It leans more towards performance art."

With a powerful and supple voice to match her eclectic tastes, Mah seems comfortable leaning in many different directions. Her repertoire includes bel canto art songs, interpretations of anything from Kurt Weill to Eric Clapton, and of course, jazz standards.

At a recent multi-act benefit concert in The Old Church, Mah sang a glowing a cappella version of "Fly Me To The Moon," yet she also improvised with wit and verve around avant-gardist Ken Butler's droning, Indian-inspired instrumentals.

Considering how much she can do, and what great friends she brings along, it sounds like a good idea for Lyndee Mah to come out and sing more often.