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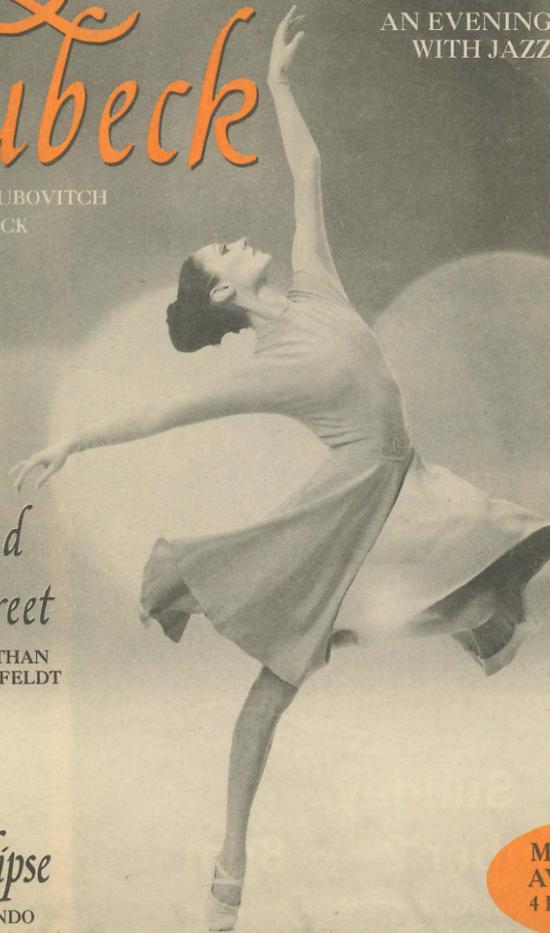
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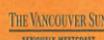
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Sorbara's Dragonette oozes sex and swagger

Winning major points for telling it like it is, a noticeably pissed Martina Sorbara spares no details when she calls in from a Travelodge in Winnipeg.

"We just got fucking fucked by our hotel," says the London, England-based frontwoman for Dragonette. "So I told them that, every single interview today, I'm going to tell people what a horrible hotel they are. I said lots of other mean things—I've probably never said that many mean things to one person. I think it might probably have something to do with some PMS I'm having, and also some back pain. But whatever—the woman at the desk got the short end of my stick."

To help take the edge off things, Sorbara cracks open a beer mid-interview. In true rock 'n' roll style, she confesses it's not from the hotel minibar, but that she found it rolling around the floor of the Dragonette tour van. If her mid-afternoon boozing and entertaining on-the-rag ranting drive anything home, it's that Sorbara doesn't have a lot of time for bullshit. And sure enough, she couldn't be more forthright on *Galore*, the synth-pop-saturated debut disc from the band that includes her husband, Don Kurtz, on bass, guitarist Will Stapleton, and drummer Joel Stouffer. The deliciously hyper-processed kickoff track, "I Get Around", for example, has her proudly suggesting that she gets more action than Winona Ryder did during the grunge years. And "Competition" lyrics like "Your girlfriend's no competition/ Goodness I like this being your mistress" take on some weight when you know that Sorbara and Kurtz started shagging when there was another woman in the picture.

Take a strong undercurrent of sex and combine it with an aesthetic that meshes the spirit of the neon-lit '80s with everything from *Sgt. Pepper* psychedelia ("True Believer") to ragtime jazz ("Get Lucky"), and you've got a formula that has the United Kingdom all atwitter. But for all the gushing accolades from the *NME*, *Uncut*, and the *Times*, life isn't yet Rolls-Royces and hanging out with the Spice Girls.

"London is just so much harder than people think," Sorbara says. "There are so many bands, and so many people there slogging it out. It's really hard to explain. But it was something that I felt I really had to do. It's not like I'm living in London because I think it's the best place on Earth. It was more that I could have stayed in Toronto, blinked, and then be 55."

Yes, as much as Dragonette seems like the U.K.'s latest flavour of the week, both Sorbara and Kurtz come from the Centre of the Universe. Sorbara—whose father, Greg, serves as the Ontario government's minister of finance—in fact spent the post-Lilith '90s toiling away as a solo artist, even landing on one of those *Women & Songs* compilations that seemed to pop up every six months. What makes her grateful for Dragonette is that she's able to indulge whatever obsession she might have at any given moment, which explains, for example, the authentic Bollywood undertow in the thrillingly exotic "Marvellous". If she's going to channel her Travelodge encounter, we can presumably expect a future work that sounds like *Rage Against the Machine* teamed up with OTEP.

"What I was doing before was very monochromatic—it was basically piano and guitar," Sorbara admits. "Because of that, I had no avenue for what was going on in my head. That's why Dragonette is so colourful and all over the place. All this stuff never had a way out until now."

> MIKE USINGER

Dragonette plays the Plaza next Thursday (November 22).

Dweezil Zappa pays tribute to his dad's musical genius

Like any dutiful son, Dweezil Zappa wants to ensure that his father's work earns the respect it's due—and in this he's both hindered



For undisclosed reasons, Dragonette's show at Larry Flynt's Hustler Club was forced to close after one performance.

and helped by the late Frank Zappa's place in the public mind. It's not that the elder Zappa has been forgotten; far from it. But it's possible that he's remembered for all the wrong things.

"The casual person, if you ask them 'Hey, have you heard any Frank Zappa music?' they don't necessarily come up with songs that reflect Frank's work as a composer," explains Dweezil, on the line from a Richmond, Virginia, tour stop. "It's always songs like 'Titties & Beer' or 'Don't Eat the Yellow Snow' or maybe 'Valley Girl'. So if you say that he's a composer and those are the only songs that they know, people just don't understand."

Musicians—especially those who've attempted to play the legendarily challenging "The Black Page" or the equally daunting "G-Spot Tornado"—know better. Frank Zappa was an incisive social satirist and a humorist with an unusually scatological bent, but he was also an extremely inventive composer and a captivatingly idiosyncratic guitar stylist. Those are the aspects of his father that Dweezil is celebrating with his *Zappa Plays Zappa* project, and even for him it's not an easy undertaking.

"I had to study the music for two years before I put the band together," reveals the guitarist. "The thing that really makes Frank's playing different is his phrasing, and that comes from being a drummer first. Often he'll attach notes to rhythmic permutations that are abnormal for a guitar player—and that's the part that's most challenging for me, because I don't have that background."

"As far as the guitar, it's changed what I'm capable of tenfold," he continues. "It's the best thing that I could ever recommend for anyone who wants to become better on any instrument. Learn some of Frank's music, and then you can apply so many things that you learn from it."

But there's a bigger mandate behind Dweezil's tribute band than

simply reminding the world that his dad was a genius. When the 38-year-old performer looks at the contemporary pop scene he sees a creative wasteland, and his aim is to return some lustre to the musician's role.

"One of Frank's most famous quotes is 'Music is the best,'" Dweezil stresses. "Above all else, he revered the process of creating music, and so the underlying thing here is about having respect for what you do. It's not about a formula or presenting something in a crass, commercial way: it's about trying to make music, and that's why I think Frank's work has so much longevity. I mean, some of these songs are 40 years old, and they sound as contemporary and cutting-edge now as they did then. I can only imagine how it must have freaked people out hearing 'Brown Shoes Don't Make It' in 1966. We play that song, and it still sounds like nothing you've ever heard."

> ALEXANDER VARTY

Zappa Plays Zappa plays the Orpheum on Tuesday (November 20).

Lerner's Fantasy continues her journey of discovery

Marilyn Lerner knows exactly what she's going to do as part of the *Comin' Out Swingin'* symposium on sexuality and improvised music. On Friday (November 16) afternoon, she'll present a retrospective look at her musical history, while that evening she'll play a solo concert in which she'll draw heavily on *Romanian Fantasy*, her 2006 tribute to the music of her Eastern European ancestors.

Just why she's been invited to the Coastal Jazz and Blues Society-sponsored conference and concert series is another matter altogether. "As far as being gay and an improviser, it's a tricky question," she says, on the line from her Toronto home. "I don't think there is such a thing as gay music. But I am gay, and I am

doing the music, so we'll just have to see how it goes."

"If my work was text-based, it might be different," she continues. "I just find it very difficult, as a musician, to have to define my music in terms of my gender. On the other hand, it is implicit that if others before me hadn't put their asses on the line, I'd be in the closet. The fact that I'm out and I'm showing my work is testament to the fact that things have changed, and for that reason alone I feel that it [the conference] is cool."

It's clear that *Comin' Out Swingin'* has got Lerner thinking: she mentions her friendship with pianist Fred Hersch, one of the few openly gay men in mainstream jazz, and how he once told her that there was a point in his career "when he wouldn't play ballads because they sounded too gay". Now, of course, Hersch is renowned for his ballads, and no one ascribes his elegant touch to his sexual orientation.

It took a while for Lerner to discover her own forte, although in her case it was curiosity that delayed her progress. "Sometimes I can't get my head around all the stuff I've done," she says. "When I look at my body of work, I'm not unhappy with it, although there have been times where it has felt like 'Who am I? What am I? What's my voice?' But as I get older I'm realizing that it's been a worthwhile personal road."

So far, that path has encompassed classical training, jazz studies, membership in the Flying Bulgar Klezmer Band, and no small amount of experimentation—all of which come together in the vibrant and expressive *Romanian Fantasy*. Are its soulful 19th-century shtetl melodies the music she was born to play?

"Well, they feel very emotionally connected to me, and that's something I really value," she says. "And I'm feeling more integrated as an artist than I ever did. Even if I'm playing free, there's always a part of me that likes melody and a part of me

that likes harmony—and that's what I'm coming out with. I'm not coming out as a gay person, I'm coming out as someone who wants harmony and melody to stay."

> ALEXANDER VARTY

Marilyn Lerner plays the St. John's College Lounge at UBC on Friday (November 16).

Myers helps locals toast the improv sound of NOW

The New Orchestra Workshop Society—Vancouver's premier contemporary jazz ensemble, and a major breeding ground for new talent—celebrates its 30th anniversary this month. To mark the occasion, NOW's artistic director, Coat Cooke, is bringing in a particularly appropriate special guest: singer, pianist, composer, and educator Amina Claudine Myers.

Myers is a good choice because she's been involved with celebratory sounds almost from birth, having grown up in the African-American gospel tradition of her native Arkansas. That in itself represents something to the members of NOW: although these Vancouver improvisers have long cultivated important ties with their European counterparts, the music they play is still deeply rooted in New Orleans-style collective polyphony, the bebop of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, and the freer sounds of Ornette Coleman and John Coltrane. As a keyboardist with a classically trained touch and an encyclopedic knowledge of jazz history, Myers is a good conduit to both streams of thought.

But there's more: although the 65-year-old musician was a professional by the time she was in her teens, it wasn't until she moved to Chicago in 1966 that she learned just how big the world of art could be. And she did that as part of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, which is very much to the Windy City what NOW is to our rainy one.

"The AACM was very open for its members," Myers explains from her New York City home, where she's enjoying a restful Saturday morning. "In other words, I was able to play with all the musicians in there. And they were painting and writing poetry and doing anything they wanted to do. So I went 'Oh, oh, oh! Okay, I can do that, too.' I'd been playing with [bop sax virtuosos] Gene Ammons and Sonny Stitt, and that was more or less traditional music; you had to play chords within the structure of so-called jazz or whatever. But the AACM really opened me up to just how creative I could be."

Since her Chicago days, Myers has explored her creativity through diverse means, including collaborations with various AACM colleagues, bassist-producer Bill Laswell, and First Nations saxophonist Jim Pepper. Most recently, she's been writing for her own vocal ensembles, most of which combine operatic singers with her own keyboard accompaniment. She notes that it's not always easy for divas and divos to shed their formal training, but it usually proves worthwhile.

"Most of the choral people—in fact, all of them—had never improvised before," she says of the 16-member choir she leads. "But they enjoyed it once they started working on it. It was a challenge for them—but it was also fun, because they could do whatever they wanted within the format."

Myers should have an easier time conducting the six singers Cooke has hired to augment the NOW's rhythm section and horns: with Christine Duncan, DB Boyko, Viviane Houle, and Peter Hurst in the lineup, improvisational brilliance will be assured. In fact, the keyboardist is the one who'll be tested: she's written for large ensemble and for choir, but never for both at the same time.

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