

Experienced slam poet creates distinct sound by mixing music, poetry

Florida musician Amy Steinberg will perform her unique music at Cafe Paradiso on June 23

By Ryan Nyburg
Senior Pulse Reporter

The line between music and poetry is often a very thin one, yet it is a line Amy Steinberg walks during every performance.

A veteran of two national poetry slam teams and an accomplished musician with six albums under her belt, Steinberg has learned to mix her twin loves of music and poetry with a healthy dose of her own self-described "progressive, New Age-y" viewpoint. Doing so was a process which has taken much of her life.

"I started to play piano when I was four, training as a classical pianist," Steinberg said. "I've been writing poetry for as long as I can remember. Through the combination of the two, my music has become very rhythmic. I don't think you can separate music and poetry."

A stint studying theater arts in college was what opened her up to the possibilities of performing her compositions, Steinberg said. The process really began when her stint in college ended.

"I dropped out of college and joined a tour of the musical 'Hair,'" Steinberg said. "That really opened me up."

After moving to her current home in Florida, Steinberg said she began to take her music seriously, performing in front of audiences who were very receptive to her work. This welcoming attitude has been prevalent throughout much of her career.

"She's amazing," Foolscape Books owner Marietta Bonaventure said. "She's a very soulful singer, and as a songwriter she really uses her poetry skills as a vehicle for her message."

Her message is mostly focused on finding power within yourself, Bonaventure said. Much of Steinberg's work deals with finding acceptance despite being outside of the

accepted standard of beauty.

"I'm not typical, not a calendar girl," Steinberg said. "I think this country has really pigeonholed beauty into this strict, size-two Madonna image. What I do makes people comfortable since I'm not the typical standard of beauty, yet I talk openly about sex and love and freedom."

Steinberg notes that many of her idols reflect this not-so-normal image: Her favorite performers include Ani DiFranco, Janis Joplin and Bette Midler. Her eclectic tastes also come through in her music, according to a Ft. Lauderdale poetry slam coach who goes by the moniker Chunky and knew Steinberg from her time on the national slam team.

"She can mix everything that is soul, R&B and folk," Chunky said. "She is a very commanding performer and very involved."

As for slamming, Steinberg has decided not to participate in the competition this year so that she may focus on her music. Still, she said she holds the event in high regard.

"I think slams are a great way for artists to get connected with one another," Steinberg said. "Part of me hates the competition. I don't think a work of art can be judged in comparison to another work of art. All this 'Star Search' and 'American Idol' stuff just leaves a bad taste in my mouth. Though that's just the pacifist-from-hell in me speaking. I've always done the slams more for the fun of it, personally."

Steinberg will perform in Eugene at Cafe Paradiso (located at 113 W. Broadway) on June 23. She said she is looking forward to the performance.

"I love Eugene," Steinberg said. "I come from the flat east, no foliage at all, so I think Eugene is a really beautiful town. People seem really receptive to what I have to say."

For ticket prices and show times, call 984-9933 or go to the Web site at www.cafeparadiso.com.

Contact the senior pulse reporter at ryanbury@dailyemerald.com.



Alanis Morissette's new album reveals a more mature, learned woman. Courtesy

'So-Called Chaos' rocks

Alanis Morissette's latest album that displays her growth and passion in her music as well as in her personal and romantic life

By Natasha Chilingirian
Pulse Reporter

Remember when Alanis Morissette first burst on the scene in 1995 with "You Oughta Know," the ultimate break-up song? The anger-charged song flooded radio stations (with a bleeped-out f-word) and turned Morissette into a household name. The lyrics on her first album, "Jagged Little Pill," expressed her intimate thoughts and struggles to achieve a fresh, alternative rock sound that was both enraged and beautiful.

The music on her newly released fourth album, "So-Called Chaos," is just as gorgeous and furious as that of her early days, but the subject matter shows that Morissette has done some soul-searching and maturing.

A perfect example is on the first track, "Eight Easy Steps," in which she declares her expertise in things she has learned over the years — including "staying paralyzed by fear of abandonment" to "pretending you're fine and don't need help from anyone." A wailing electric guitar builds the energy typical of Morissette's songs: Her vocals are passionate and never tainted by screaming or grunting.

I played "Doth I Protest Too Much" over and over again. Perhaps it was the big sound, provided by guitars, keyboards, piano, bass and drums; maybe it was the catchy tune reminiscent of her older tune "Head Over Feet," also from "Jagged Little Pill," or it could have been

the empowering lyrics.

In this song, Morissette describes how she is not in the least bit bothered by her lover, who develops a wandering eye, can't seem to make time for her and eventually finds a new woman.

It's evident that Morissette has been reflecting on the bigger picture of life lately on the title track, "So-Called Chaos." The song lists all the stresses of our fast-paced work world, sharing the perspective that even if we don't make every meeting and deadline, life will go on. Morissette claims her desire for freedom: "I want to be naked running through the streets / I want to invite this so-called chaos that you think I dare not be / I want to be weightless flying through the air / I want to drop all these limitations but the shoes on my feet."

Morissette also proves to have grown capable of having more stable romantic relationships. First, in the creative "Knees of My Bees," she confesses, "You make the knees of my bees weak / tremble and buckle." Aside from an unusual spin on words, the song includes exotic sitar notes. Second, the last track, "Everything," is an appreciation of a lover who stays with her despite all her flaws. The tune is nice, but could gain more strength if it sped up a bit.

"So-Called Chaos" is a reminder of Morissette's talent and power and totes a grown-up flavor. She even looks more put-together and polished on the cover photo than she did on some of her past albums. And, without a doubt, the songs are bound to become new Alanis-fan favorites.

Contact the Pulse reporter at natashachilingirian@dailyemerald.com.

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