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Motherlode: striking it rich

Benefitting from their past history as experienced entertainers, Motherlode gave every impression of performing for just a few good friends who happened to drop by for a visit

BY DR. TANTALUS

Remember July? You know, the summer monsoon season when you can't afford to leave the house without a pair of shorts and an umbrella? Well, it was way back on July 21 that Motherlode took the stage at the Northwest Service Center and charmed an audience of 250 people with more than a dozen songs about life, love and chocolate.

Music

This performance was presented by Lesbians in Progress in conjunction with the National Lesbian Conference Planning Meeting held that weekend at Portland State University. In addition to Motherlode (the star attraction), the Portland Lesbian Choir and Musica Femina also performed before the enthusiastic crowd.

The delay in reviewing this performance was partially due to Dr. Tantalus' inability to find any kind of program for the evening's presentation. Whether this was due to lack of funds or Dr. T's careless ways is still a mystery, but it made a precise determination of songs and their titles somewhat difficult, especially when all songs were not announced from the stage. Therefore, apologies are offered up front for any inaccuracies faithful and knowledgeable readers may discover in this review.

The evening opened with a short five-song set from the Portland Lesbian Choir, who gave evidence of continuing improvement. Perhaps their two best songs were versions of "Somewhere Out There," the Academy Award-winning song originally performed by Linda Ronstadt and James Ingram, and "Keep Moving Forward," one of a trio of songs celebrating lesbian pride. However, all songs displayed the Choir's enthusiasm and energy, trademarks that have carried the local men's chorus to success on more than one occasion.

The acoustics of the Northwest Service Center were not as kind as one might have hoped and some voices in the Choir carried more than others in that semi-cavernous environment. As a result, some songs lost the blend necessary to present them as an integrated whole. Only time will tell whether this is a problem with the hall itself, or whether the Choir needs to focus on performing as a group.

Following the Choir's enthusiastically received performance was Motherlode's first set. Comprised of four talented women, Motherlode took to the stage exuding confidence and grace. Benefitting from their past history as experienced entertainers, the group engaged in casual and witty banter throughout the evening, giving every impression that they were performing for just a few good friends who happened to drop by for a visit. As a result, a peaceful and good natured atmosphere pervaded the hall.



The first set provided the audience with several musical gems to remember. "Shaven Lady," for example, displayed the group's penchant for razor sharp humor while "Mama's Hands" touched upon more serious matters aided by some fine cello work and nicely crafted harmonies. The highlight was "Everything Possible," which provided a certain buoyancy and emotional uplift on a theme reflected by its title.

Special guests Musica Femina then made a brief appearance. This guitar-flute duo, dedicated to exploring women's music of both the past and present, performed three pieces: "April Toy," described as "psuedo-renaissance" in nature, "New Beginnings," and the three-part "Bay Bridge Suite." Musica Femina's strong point is the crystalline clarity of their performance and on this night they did not disappoint. The first movement of the "Bay Bridge Suite" was particularly impressive. (Note to audience: typically, one does not applaud after the conclusion of the first movement of a piece such as this. Ditto for applause between movements of Beethoven symphonies.)

Motherlode returned for the evening's closing set with the energetic and fun "Woman with a Chainsaw," which humorously explored desired characteristics in a life mate. (It appears that a rototiller may also be sufficient.) This was quickly followed by the equally humorous "Chocolate," the drug of choice for many otherwise reasonable people.

After such a fine beginning it was difficult to imagine that such heights could be sustained later in the set. Janis Ian's "Every Love," however, proved to be a powerful and moving performance. The evening concluded, as might be expected, with all performers coming to the stage for the grand finale.

Impressive for their musical talents (cello, flute, mandolin, guitar and bass) as well as their emotional content, Motherlode is an act worth catching. Let's hope they reach the wider audience they so richly deserve. ▼

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