

# just entertainment

## Celebrating life's loves

Jazz singer Theresa Clark headlines Friends, Phoenix Rising's Valentine's Day dance party

BY ANNDEE HOCHMAN

When Theresa Clark steps in front of the band at this month's Valentine's dance to benefit Phoenix Rising, and she opens her mouth, and a jazz standard from your parents' generation comes lilting out, you might think the whole affair is as traditional as heart-shaped doilies.

But Clark, a Seattle jazz vocalist, as well as the organizers of the dance, say this event involves more than meets the ear.

As an openly lesbian performer singing big-band style jazz, Clark is challenging the genre's sexist tradition and the notion that a female vocalist's role in it is mostly decorative.

"I think it's really important to be out there as a lesbian singing jazz," Clark said in a recent phone interview. "A lot of times jazz can be really heterosexist. I try to have a real presence as a singer, to convey to the band that I'm not only a singer, I'm a full musician and I understand what's going on."

Redefining the jazz-singer stereotype fits into the larger goal of the February 16 benefit — to recast Valentine's Day in a shape that recognizes the various forms of love between partners and friends. Planners of the event say they hope not only to raise \$5,000 for the agency's counseling and support programs but to include lesbians and gay men in a holiday that has traditionally left them out.

"We're trying to provide an opportunity for gay and lesbian people to get together and affirm all our relationships," said Allemann, a Phoenix Rising board member.

Board member Steve Fredericks said planners hope this will be the first in a series of annual fund-raising social events for Phoenix Rising. "We wanted to advertise the dance in a such a way that didn't emphasize couples. It's to celebrate the love in our lives rather than the coupling tradition."

In addition to Theresa Clark, the dance will feature Jive, an 18-piece dance band, hors d'oeuvres and a no-host bar, a silent auction and a "wish tree" on which people can place wishes for themselves, their partners, friends and families.

For Clark, 36, the performance will be a chance to showcase her favored approach to music — putting a thoughtful spin on a familiar tradition.

Clark, a native of Washington, DC, studied the basics of traditional and contemporary jazz at Cornish College for the Arts after moving to Seattle in 1981. Since then, she has recorded an album with "Sundance," a reggae band, composed a flute-and-guitar piece for Portland's Musica Femina, founded an acapella quartet and performed collaborative work with Seattle poet Carletta Wilson.

A cassette of their work, "In Here by Turns," was released in 1988. Last summer, they taught a class called "Word/Sound" — coaching students to blend voice, sound, poetry and performance — at Flight of the Mind, a feminist writers' workshop in McKenzie Bridge. They will teach a similar class at this summer's workshop.

Recently, Clark spoke at a lesbian/feminist conference in Seattle about parallels between her approach to music and her approach to life.

"I talked about how jazz formed me, as a paradigm for understanding politics and living life. [With jazz] it's really important to understand and know the tradition. It's also really important to add to that tradition.

"When I'm doing things with Carletta, I'm still drawing on that tradition, on the techniques I've learned, but I'm also adding to that."

Jazz also fits into Clark's sense of life as a collaboration. "I don't think of jazz as the kind of music that's made by a soloist. Even



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when I perform solo, I'm carrying around other people in my head," she said.

Clark and Wilson are presently working on a poetry/sound video for a Seattle community television series. Clark said she also hopes to write another composition for Musica Femina.

Her musical style and tastes have evolved over the past 15 years. While in Washington, DC, Clark played electric keyboards and guitar in a pop/rock band. In 1983, a profile in Seattle's Capitol Hill Times described her as a coffeehouse singer whose compositions aimed to poke audiences' consciousness.

"For years I was involved in political and overtly rhetorical music," Clark said. "Just before I went to school, I sort of put some of that aside. I felt like I had gotten tired of

hearing people preach at me through music. I was more interested in telling stories and conveying feelings.

"With a performance like this one, what I'm trying to convey is: 'I'm a lesbian. I really love this music. I hope you love it too and have a good time with it.'"

Friends, a Valentine's dance party to benefit Phoenix Rising will be held at the Western Forestry Center in Washington Park on Friday, February 16. All ages welcome. Tickets \$25 in advance, \$27 at the door. Tickets available at A Woman's Place Bookstore and the Phoenix Rising office, 333 SW 5th, Suite 404. For information call 223-8299.

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