

MUSIC

There are times in your life when you feel pretty awesome—times when you're able to overcome your moderately self-deprecating tendencies just long enough to think: "Yeah! I'm a good person who has accomplished a lot in my lifetime, dammit. I'm somebody!"

Then you meet Lynn Thomas. And you return to the pathetic depths of Nobodyland.

I'm exaggerating, of course, but the truth about Thomas, a recent transplant to Portland, is that her résumé isn't her only attribute that stretches out toward infinity. Her hope and vision do, as well.

Thomas is a young 41-year-old who has been on the music circuit since the age of 3, when she began playing piano and singing in her hometown near Reading, Pa. She followed her natural inclinations throughout college, came into her own as a songwriter, began to work as the project director and music director for a production company called Ms. Moses and eventually produced a CD of her own titled *Courage* in the early '90s.

Although she's no stranger to women's music festivals, there is certainly something strange about Thomas: She isn't a lesbian folk singer with a guitar! Instead, her chosen ax is a Yamaha keyboard or a piano, and her songwriting—although politically driven at times—often takes on a comedic slant.

For example, her CD's first track, "Dykes," is a two-minute, karaoke-flavored, '50s-style romp about, hmmm, well, dykes. "Straight People" is a witty number about her parents, her "only two straight friends." "Lavender Love," a Caribbean-tinged ditty, sounds like something that should be played on a queer cruise ship.

Appropriately enough, Thomas just recently played her final, regular Sunday-night gig at

Hobo's in Portland so she could prepare for her new job: providing 30 weeks of musical entertainment on the Columbia Queen, a ship that sails the Columbia River to Idaho and back for seven days at a time. "I get to come home for a few hours every Saturday," Thomas says.

Her approach to songwriting is one in which the lyrics and music are married. "The music and words come simultaneously; they're inseparable. For me, music is language," she says. "First I take a concept, something that's important, something that needs to be said. Generally, the hook bubbles to the surface."

About 10 years ago, one of those hooks took her to the big time. After performing at a women's festival in Mississippi, Thomas was asked to compose the anthem to the 1993 March on Washington. She approached the idea in a "We Are the World" sort of way by having about 70 singers, including familiar artists such as Holly Near and Nedra Johnson, guest star on a jubilant mock epic, "Together, Proud and Strong."

After the recording was complete, Thomas sent the music and lyrics to gay and lesbian choirs around the nation. During the March on Washington, legions of queer singers stood on the steps of the Capitol and belted out her tune.

For obvious reasons, Thomas says this was one of the most triumphant moments of her career. "It was an amazing feeling," she says. Coming in at a close second was her performance 2 1/2 years ago at a comedy festival in Pensacola, Fla., alongside lesbian comic Suzanne Westenhoefer and others.

One of Thomas' recently completed projects shows a bit more of her introspective side—interestingly enough, it was not necessarily

Taking root

Portland musician goes down under for love and connection

BY KATY DAVIDSON

apparent in the music but more in the nature of the work. Last fall, she and Ms. Moses Productions arranged a 24-city tour for "Upstart Aussies," four music and dance groups of primarily aboriginal artists. Her intention for the show was to help build a cultural bridge between U.S. audiences and the diverse Australian art represented by these performers.

Now, what drove a middle-aged lesbian musician from Pennsylvania to bring more than a dozen Australian performers to the United States? Roots, baby. Roots.

Adopted as an infant, Thomas says she always has been on the lookout for people who resemble her. When she toured down under in 1999, she thought the physical similarities between herself and the aboriginal people were uncanny.

"I found it amazing. The hair, face and body type all matched," she says. "It was very bizarre. I'd walk down the street, and people would give me a nod."

Thomas says she was startled and empowered when she was given reason to believe she might be one of the "stolen" generation, a group of aboriginal children shipped to the United States about 40 years ago to be raised by white parents. The extensive tour gave her



Lynn Thomas sees an Australian when she looks in the mirror

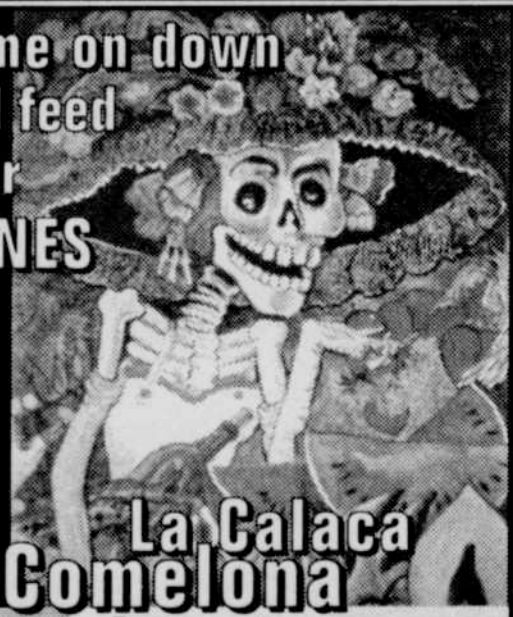
the chance to strengthen her Australian connection—and to meet her current girlfriend.

In spite of Thomas' still-unanswered questions about her past, she continues to interest audiences by setting comedy and love to music. She says the interplay between humor and love, in fact, is "the blueprint of my life." ■

To hear the music of LYNN THOMAS, visit the Internet site www.msamoses.com.

KATY DAVIDSON is a Portland musician and free-lance writer who's about to head off on her own tour.

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