

PEOPLE

A soulful concern

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entrepreneur has "always had a thing for spoken word," she says, "everything from the Doors to Ani DiFranco to Sekou Sundiata."

In the end, Huffman admits she had to "just let go of all my ideas of exactly what I was going out to do." And, she muses, "it's actually been more interesting."

She has definitely come to know her subject, which has strengthened her desire to produce the work. "I never realized how strongly it affected me until I started going to poetry events with Aisha. Suddenly it didn't really matter whether there was music behind it or not; it was all just intensity and intention and the message behind it."

Huffman ties this experience into other musical art forms. "It goes back to my love for hip-hop, which to me is just a '90s version of folk music—of the people, by the people, for the people.... Spoken word is no different than that, just without the music."

The women jumped into the project admittedly not really knowing what they were doing, but resources quickly came their way. "Everything was very grassroots," smiles Huffman, who set up a "makeshift studio" in her house.

She borrowed a four-track from a friend, and "it just happens that my downstairs neighbor is a sound engineer. I have another friend who has his own record label in town, so he helped out a lot. It was just amazing."

She is learning the ropes of promotion and booking in support of Ayers' CD. The two hope to take the show on the road, as well.

Huffman has found the male-dominated music and recording industry to be somewhat challenging. "I am slightly intimidated by it, but it just makes me want to work harder...when you read through a list of record producers you never even see a woman's name, ever."

She knows the same gender barriers exist for the artists, too. "That's one thing I really want to push is women who have something to



Emily Huffman's abode is all things music

those were canceled, though, "it was hellacious," Huffman exclaims. "They let everybody off...it was 400 artists out of work in this town."

She found it difficult to get into film or television work again, noting "there's definitely a level of hierarchy here in terms of getting work." Because most of her experience was in coordination and management and not in sound, which is done in Los Angeles for Will Vinton, she lacked the skills she needed to compete with all that available labor.

To get more experience, Huffman plans to spend at least a year studying at the Center for Digital Imaging and Sound in Vancouver, British Columbia, beginning this fall.

From there, who knows?

Venus Flytrack, she thinks, is "going to grow into a bigger concept of a production company and not specifically a record label.... I would love to be a producer. I just need enough skills to be able to go out on my own...and use a professional studio." The long-term goal is to have her own recording space, "to have access and resources to open up to other people." □

say, specifically women MCs because there are so few. Most of them are not women you'll ever hear on the radio.... I want to see the women supported out there in every aspect."

Huffman emphasizes the need for opportunities for all up-and-coming performers because of rampant discrimination in the recording industry—based on race and gender and, also, sexual identity. She says it's "a bonus for me to represent other queer folk in an industry where that might otherwise be a point of contention."

Although she's not a musician, Huffman has had a long and varied love affair with music. "I have this weird collection of women folk singers and old soul, R & B and hip-hop."

She's also into jazz but admits "for the longest time I was really scared of jazz music because it's so huge...I didn't know where to start." Typically, she just jumped in. "I've really started getting into a lot of abstract jazz, modern fusion. But my first love is definitely hip-hop, soul, R & B and," she grins, "it's always the ladies that I seek out."

Huffman comes to Portland's spoken word and music scene by way of North Carolina, where she was born but, she says, where she never quite fit in. "Everybody when I was growing up always asked if I was from New York, so I thought, 'Hey, maybe I should go there.'"

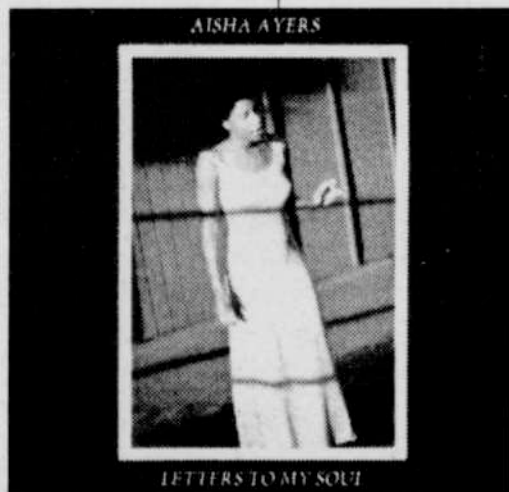
Off to Syracuse University, then, where she received a television and film degree and, in the process, learned just enough about sound and engineering to pique her interest. She decided against the obvious choices of Los Angeles or New York and moved to Portland, where many of her friends had already relocated.

She says the music scene was difficult to break into. Although, she notes, there's a lot of music, "I realized really quickly that it was all mom-and-pop-sized businesses and nobody really needed any help other than everybody that was volunteering. So I paid my dues working in coffee shops...still am, as a matter of fact."

But she eventually found a place at Will Vinton Studios working on the Eddie Murphy series *The PJs* and UPN's *Gary & Mike*. When

"When you read through a list of record producers you never even see a woman's name, ever"

—Emily Huffman



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