

**MUSIC**

**Uncategorically determined**

Once a classically trained pianist, songwriter Patricia Ju now sets her sights on pop stardom

BY COURTNEY PERKINS

**W**hen you think about mainstream music, you think of categories. Country, rock, rap, American teen idol or sexy Latin sensation—for the most part, each singer and style comes neatly packaged complete with a label about what to expect.

On the other hand, diversity—all that is good and holy and gay—is not usually the first aspect of an artist to be mass-marketed in a music industry fueled by money and appearances. However, for all those who doubt mainstream music will ever welcome difference, take heed, because the industry just met artist Patricia Ju.

Armed with originality and an insatiable desire to succeed, this 28-year-old songwriter is taking on the business and doing it on her own terms.

"It ain't every day that a Chinese butch lesbian decides to go to Nashville to show some country songs," wrote Ju in an e-mail to *Just Out*. No, it certainly isn't.

Ju recently returned from Nashville's Tin Pan South, the world's largest annual songwriters convention, where she pitched tunes, handed out demos and rubbed elbows with music producers from around the nation. However, the Portlander is only a little bit country.

Self-described as alternative pop rock with an occasional country, techno or rap cut, Ju's music masterfully combines melodic piano ballads with raw vocals and catchy lyrics that can be both sweet and haunting. Her songs tell mostly of heartbreak, although her sensitivity to social issues such as suicide, war and domestic violence cannot be ignored. Yet, like her music, which is both versatile and notably different from what's on radio, Ju refuses to be typecast.

"There's so many categories that I fit into that transcend and span into my music," she says. "I perform and write from how I feel and hope that it will make other people feel excited or not alone. All the other categories that I fit into aren't the whole."

Ju's musical career didn't begin devoid of the stereotypes she now defies. She, too, began as a mold.

**B**orn in Taipei, Taiwan, Ju moved to the States with her family as an infant. Though she says she can't remember exactly how it

started, she began playing piano simply because it was the thing to do.

More specifically, it was something that "little Asian kids" were expected to do. "I was forced into it, or it was put upon me as something to make me more rounded," Ju says.

The first time she laid her hands on the keys of a piano at the age of 5, it was obvious she had been blessed with an innate gift.

"Halfway through my first lesson my teacher ran out shouting, 'I have a genius, I have a genius,'" Ju smiles. "My mother asked her who it was, and she said, 'Your daughter.'"

This gave Ju's parents the opportunity to push her to further her skills as a classical pianist. A year later, she was the youngest person at the time to be accepted into the

piano program at the Juilliard School in New York.

She studied piano, composition and conducting for the next 10 years at the renowned academy. In addition to

winning a handful of prestigious awards, Ju's work at Juilliard also landed her a piano scholarship to University of Michigan.

But the promise of a successful future as a classical pianist was not enough to keep the phenom motivated. Ju saw piano as a chore rather than a dream. Her real passion and interest in music was driven by the desire to make rock 'n' roll.

After two years at Michigan, Ju became discouraged with her training in technical music, craving a more contemporary sound. She felt her classical background wasn't helping her write hit songs.



Portlander Patricia Ju is determined to make it big on her own

breakup with an ex-girlfriend provided a surprising cure to her writing woes.

"This is bad, but it was a good thing for my music," Ju explains. "It was a good place to start from."

Stuff just poured out of me." She released her first EP, *Gonna Bring You Back to Me*.



In addition to playing Portland venues,

Ju has discovered that promoting

and coordinating shows is a good way to both satiate her new hunger for music and get her name out. Through the years she has put together as well as performed in many benefit shows all over town for organizations like KBOO and the Rock 'n' Roll Camp for Girls. She also worked as a karaoke disc jockey at the Egyptian Club for a time.

Now the enterprising artist is dedicated to performing and marketing her own music and to putting together her first full-length CD, tentatively titled *Covet*. Although she says it can be tight financially, she has learned to embrace the life of a struggling artist. In fact, she couldn't be happier about it.

Having fought against other people's expectations her entire life, Patricia Ju refuses to be categorized. Following the lead of a lot of

independent artists, she's making the music she wants more than concerning herself with popular success.

Not to say she doesn't have dreams of becoming a star. She does, just as long as it's on her own terms.

"I want to be like Madonna," she states matter-of-factly, "but I don't want to give my life up to some amorphous company. That wouldn't make me happy." □

Visit PATRICIA JU at [www.patriciaju.com](http://www.patriciaju.com). Hear her music and buy her EP at [www.mp3.com](http://www.mp3.com).

COURTNEY PERKINS is a Portland free-lance writer.

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—Patricia Ju

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