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
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MUSIC

**Blood-rich warbler**

Portland's newest songbird is a human collaboration

BY MARIE FLEISCHMANN



Myshkin's Ruby Warblers play Jan. 4 at Alberta Street Pub

The room quiets. A woman walks on stage with a shiny guitar, dusty boots and a gorgeous, wise smile. The initial excitement of finger-picking and steady strumming swells into the rush of vocals that makes you rethink your master plan.

The recipe makes perfect sense. Her dad had a passion for classical music, mom played piano and sang, and the sibs loaned her everything from rock 'n' roll records to instruments. She started writing songs as soon as she got a guitar in her hands. How long ago was that? Myshkin replies with a smirk: "Well, how old are you? Add a few years."

The Indiana native, who plays Jan. 4 at Alberta Street Pub, ran away to New Mexico, spent some time traveling and was sucked downriver to New Orleans in 1993, when she debuted with *Slate* on Wreck It Records. She continued to blaze through albums with the bands Myshkin Impossible, Mike and Myshkin and the ez bake organs.

Nine varieties of bands and records, dozens of songs and a hoard of friendships later, the queer singer came to the Northwest "for mountains, friends, good food, and [I] felt that it seemed to be kind of hopping culturally—for a small city—and have a populace that likes words, too, not just grooves." Southeast Portland is a good fit for the musician and her dog, Spider. "In these freaky times it is better to be surrounded by like-minded folks. The amount of political action going on in this town is strengthening and inspiring to me."

A new city, a new band. Myshkin's Ruby Warblers formed in New Orleans in 2001, so Myshkin decided to bring the name along with her and give it a new home in Portland with guitarist Nick Jaina and bassist Brent Martens. Drummer Scott Magee soon will move from New Orleans to Portland, continuing a six-year working relationship. Back from a recent tour of the U.K., the band plans to take their "gypsy torch punk" around the American West over the next few months.

The Warblers' first release, 2002's *rosebud • bullets*, is Myshkin's favorite album of hers, reflecting more time spent in the studio and her total artistic and production control. All previous works, she explains, "had some element of rush or muddle [or] a hastily pulled-together band...I've listened to [*rosebud • bullets*] hundreds of times in the making of it, and I can still listen to it and like it. And I'm damn

critical." The album has been picked up for national distribution.

One project at a time, however, is not on the singer/songwriter's CV; hence, she's also one of The Road Dog Divas. The trio's 2002 self-titled release parcels their combined creative, fun and funky touring package, which includes stops in the Midwest and Eastern Canada next month.

Northwest dyke duo Kid Quiz is also taking up some of Myshkin's clearly endless musical energy at their Philomath home studio. She's "having a blast" playing around with drum machines, loops and samples for the first time. "I have this bunch of songs that I have never recorded and don't play out much—a lot of war songs," she explains, "so it's great to have some material to try some weird things with. I think it's going to turn into a really nice record, very slow and quiet."

Myshkin's current musical ear turns to everything from Flamenco singers to gypsy bands to West African rhythms. She describes New Orleans as a "school for music" and is grateful she wound up there for as long as she did. "I got to play the New Orleans Jazz Fest a few years back. That was great—the biggest show in the hometown.... The atmosphere is so good there—everyone stuffed with music and happy."

She also enjoyed "the longest and most meaningful collaboration" of her life there with "urban hillbilly" banjo phenomenon Mike West. "I describe my songs as gypsy torch punk, so our shows together always had a pretty vast dichotomy. We learned a lot from each other and grew so much while working together."

But don't worry, Myshkin's not hightailing back anytime soon. Portland has made its impression. "I'm really glad to be in a place where there is a big queer community and a big alternative community of all stripes. It comes as a huge relief...there's a lot of connection between different groups. That's one of the most exciting aspects of living here for me. People giving voice to what's really going on is indicative that they know how to work together to make things happen." □

MYSHKIN'S RUBY WARBLERS play 9 p.m. Jan. 4 at Alberta Street Pub, 1036 N.E. Alberta St. Cover is \$6.. Visit the singer at [www.myshkinsrubywarblers.com](http://www.myshkinsrubywarblers.com).

MARIE FLEISCHMANN is a musician, poet and Editorial Assistant at Just Out.