

MUSIC

When Southeast Portland rock venue The Blackbird closed last fall, independent artists with a penchant for experimentalism lost their landing pad. And listeners looking for an alternative to the soulless downtown haunts found themselves staring at a gaping hole in the PDX music community.

So thank goodness for Nocturnal, an intimate East Burnside all-ages venue with a downstairs bar. The always queer-friendly spot goes girl crazy this month with Atlanta singer/songwriter Michelle Malone on April 23 and recent Portland transplant Tara Jane O'Neil (formerly of Rodan, Retsin and The Sonora Pine) on April 29.

Both artists have built fiercely independent careers, releasing records on their own labels and making music solely to feed their muses.

Sonically, O'Neil is all over the map. Her solo material often submerges deep below the surface, quietly searching, offering few answers. But for the better part of last year, she played bass in King Cobra, a twisted prog-metal trio.

"It's good for me to exercise as many musical muscles as I can," she tells *Just Out*. "I make beauty music, but I also need to rock and play more jagged stuff."

O'Neil (known as TJO to her fans) is carving her own path as an independent artist. Her music is widely variant, and her home base is a moving target (Portland via NYC via Louisville, Ky.). Sometimes she's the studio whiz (Antietam), sometimes she's the sideman (Papa M). Sometimes she's a solo performer, and sometimes she's a collaborator.

Then, when she's not writing/producing/recording music, O'Neil focuses on visual media. In 2003, Japanese publisher Map Press released her collection of drawings and writ-

ings, *Who Takes a Feather*—but she didn't expect much. Now you can find it at any number of Portland book and record stores.

"I'm surprised that I ever got to make a book," she shares. "I'm really lucky that my friends in Japan are fans of my art stuff...I'm happy that people like it...I kind of thought it would be distributed in Japan only, but it's spread around, and that's surprising—and good."

Recently taking advantage of Multnomah County's legalized same-sex marriage, O'Neil exudes freedom and joy when asked how it feels to be queer and married.

"Portland feels like a good place to be gay. And in love.... With King Cobra, it's been really great to be an out queer onstage in a way that I wasn't before. In my own mind, I was always out onstage, but it hasn't always come across to the audience. It isn't the reason I take the stage, but it's important to me to have that in the mix."

Portland will also likely give a hearty lesbianic welcome to Malone, who's no stranger to the Rose City. A stubbornly

She'll only come out at night

Queer girl rockers take root at Nocturnal

BY CORI TARATOOT

Tara Jane O'Neil recently moved to Portland and married her sweetheart



Michelle Malone made the record she wanted to. "Fuck everybody else."

independent artist, she is an activist ("right now I'm focusing on getting the vote out") and an openly queer musician. So it makes sense

that something about Portland resonates with the bluesy rockin' singer/songwriter.

"I love Portland. I've actually written some of my best songs there," she says. "I wrote a bunch of songs off the new record [*Stompin' Ground*]...in Portland last summer. I was sort of on a roll I guess. Every time I come there, there's some big political something going on in the street down below my hotel. Portland's a very creative place, and I can see why."

But don't expect to hear Malone proselytizing in her music or in interviews. She's mostly interested in the simple things: electric guitars, Marshall stacks and the Rolling Stones.

"*Exile on Main Street* and *Let It Bleed* are two of my favorite albums," she admits. "I'm stuck there. That stuff came out when I was an infant, but I just love it. That's what turns me on, that's the kind of music I like to make. I decided with this record I was gonna make the record that I wanted to listen to, and fuck everybody else. I don't care what they're playing on the radio, I don't care what's happening on MTV...or what people are writing or playing—this is what I want to do. And I'm pretty happy with it."

Put your concerns away for the night—and bring your earplugs. **IN**

All-ages NOCTURNAL, 1800 E. Burnside St., plays host to Michelle Malone at 8 p.m. April 23.

Portland queer musician Ashleigh Flynn opens. Tickets are \$10 at the door. Tara Jane O'Neil plays at 8 p.m. April 29. Antietam and Davies vs Dresch open. Tickets are \$6 at the door.

CORI TARATOOT is a Portland free-lance writer.

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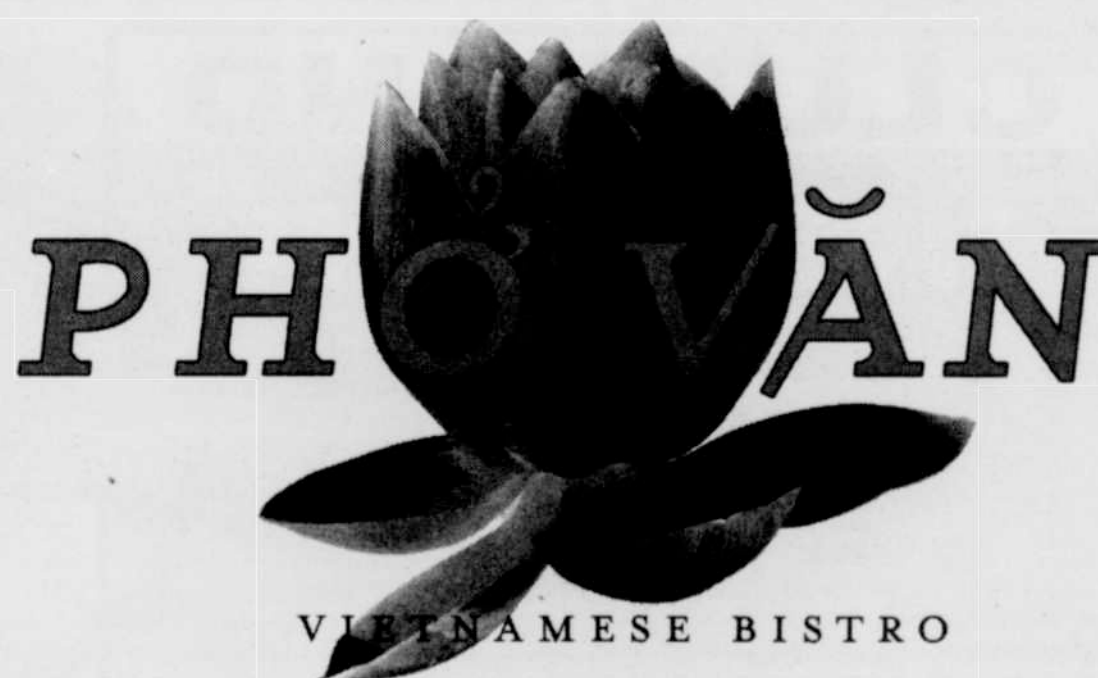
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