

In the Pink

Timothy Nishimoto will sell no wine before it's time. In fact, he's been waiting for almost 15 years.

Portland musician Timothy Nishimoto—who you might recognize as “that other gay Asian guy in Pink Martini”—recently realized a longtime dream.

Was it the band's national television debut Nov. 22 on *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*? Nah. (Although it was trippy to meet the host: “He's gigantic...and super skinny.”)

Performing in front of 18,000 fans Sept. 10 at the sold-out Hollywood Bowl? Nope. (Although he worked through some fear issues that evening: “It's a huge, huge thing for me not to be nervous.”)

Opening a trendy, friendly wine bar in the Pearl District? Ah, yes!

Nishimoto was born in Florida and raised in Southern California, where the aspiring theatrical arts major switched to business studies at Cal State Long Beach under pressure from his father. “By the time I graduated [in 1990], my goal was to open a restaurant,” he says.

That urge grew stronger during a string of jobs both on the floor and in management at Portland eateries Bima, Papa Haydn and Santa Fe. “In working in restaurants, the thing that I loved most was talking about wine, ordering wine, discussing wine. I don't know why. It's always just been a big passion of mine.”

That path led him to Nature's, where he began work as a wine steward in 1999. “I loved that job. I got paid to talk about wine.”

So when he learned that the owners of Vigne were selling their wine bar, he jumped at the chance—but only put out a low bid, letting fate take its course. “They took my offer. I was kind of like, ‘Oh, shit, what am I doing?’”

He seems to have a pretty good idea. Vino Paradiso has a warm atmosphere, curated art exhibits and a cellar that aims to be extensive yet accessible.

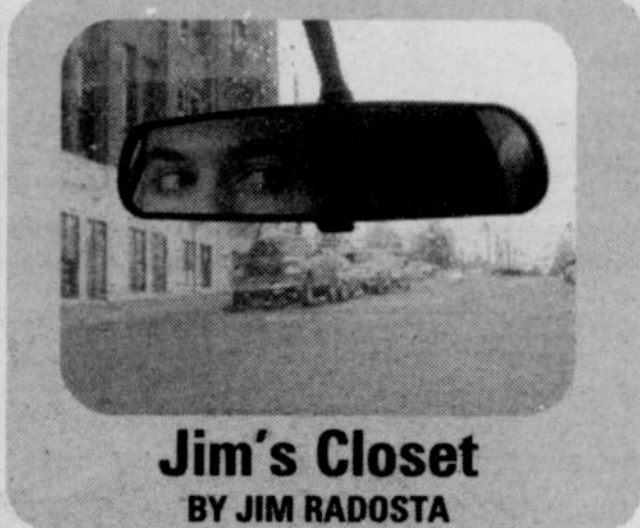
“I really believe that when people hear ‘wine bar,’ they think it's gonna be pretentious and stuffy and expensive and you have to know a lot about wine,” he says. “The intimidation factor is huge...people just don't think of a wine bar as being friendly. That's our main thing.”

Another goal is to reassure the uninitiated that wine bars specialize in food, too. Nishimoto recently hired a new chef, Park Kitchen vet Matt Stauss, who teaches monthly classes pairing wine with food.

He also found two managers, Todd O'Connor and Bill Less, to hold down the fort while he's on the road with the band. Well, one of them wasn't too hard to find—O'Connor is his boyfriend.

Nishimoto started performing with Pink Martini in 1994, when frontman Thomas Lauderdale took a chance on him even though he had no formal training and couldn't read music. He quit in 1996 partially because of stage fright (“I would screw up words, and Thomas would get a bit upset”) but returned as an official member three years ago when Lauderdale offered to pay for vocal and percussion lessons in preparation for *Hang on Little Tomato*, the band's long-awaited sophomore album that finally came out last year.

“It was all Thomas. Thomas is one of those people who can just really pull talent out of people,”



Nishimoto says. “He has so much confidence in people... He can do anything he wants to do, and he *will* do anything he wants to do. And in that way he's so motivating and so inspiring.”

Nishimoto, who is fluent in French, Spanish and Portuguese and has studied Japanese and German, shows off his global linguistic skills on *Tomato* tracks “Anna (El Negro Zumbon),” “Dansez-vous” and “Kikuchiyo to Mohshimasu.”

And he's about to make his solo debut at Vino Paradiso with a set list that includes bossa nova and a Brazilian sound known as pagode.

“It's like a backyard style of music where people on Sunday

afternoons get together and everyone brings an instrument and everyone knows the words and everyone samba dances,” Nishimoto says. “When you get it right, the vibe is really, really cool.”

The audience will also get a sneak preview of “Cante e Danse,” a Portuguese song written by Pink Martini bassist Phil Baker that's slated for the band's next album.

“It's the first time I'll be fronting,” the 41-year-old says. “I'm pretty excited. I'm actually a little bit nervous about it.”

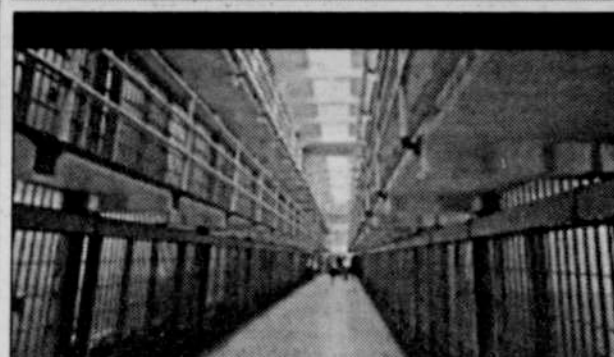
Uh-oh. Didn't he get over that already? Somehow, I think he'll be fine.

“I was just writing an e-mail to my mom about how sometimes I have all these dreams that come true all at once,” Nishimoto told me. “I don't take it for granted ever. To be able to play, to sing and own a restaurant—and to sing in my own restaurant—it's amazing to me. I truly feel blessed.”

TIMOTHY NISHIMOTO sings with Pink Martini's Martin ZarZar on guitar from 6 to 8 p.m. Dec. 18 at Vino Paradiso, 417 N.W. 10th Ave. The full band performs with the Lions of Batucada, members of the Harvey Rosencrantz Orchestra and special guests Jimmy Scott and the Jazz Expressions 7 and 10:30 p.m. Dec. 31 at Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall, 1037 S.W. Broadway. Tickets are \$25-\$60 from Ticketmaster. For more information visit www.vinoparadiso.com.

Arts and Culture Editor JIM RADOSTA needs your feedback. Write to jim@justout.com.

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