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Suddenly. This Summer

Catching up with
sultry singer and
now-Oregonian Martha
Davis of The Motels

By BYRON BECK

Lesbians and gays have plenty of music to call their own: Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive," Janis Ian's "At Seventeen," or just about any song by The Indigo Girls. But there aren't a lot of songs both lesbos and gays, especially those of us who lived through the highly impressionable early years of MTV, share equally like The Motels' "Only The Lonely." That haunting melody hit Billboard's Top Ten in '82 with the lyrics: "We walk the loneliest mile/We smiled without any style/We kissed altogether wrong/No intention." At the time it was a national anthem for the disenfranchised, many of them gay.

Fast forward to the summer of 2009. At this year's Pride Celebration at Waterfront Park, the lady who wrote that song, who also happens to be The Motels' lead singer, belted out the oldie to a highly appreciative audience.

Martha Davis had performed the sensitive ballad at Pride celebrations before, but something happened when she sang it on a late Saturday afternoon in June in front of a Portland crowd. As she looked out at the faces and started to sing, Davis realized the song wasn't just about herself or the pain she felt when she penned it.

That's when it hit her.

"This song is about gay people too and all the hypocrisy one has to live with when you can't be yourself," Davis says over a latte in a Northwest Portland coffeehouse. "Dude, I finally realized this is totally a gay song."

Those of all orientations, sexual or otherwise, will get a chance to see her perform that song as well as her other hits — among them, "Suddenly, Last Summer" and "Take The L"

— and plenty of new material when Davis and a fresh version of The Motels takes the stage at Dante's on Friday, July 24.

New wave music stars of the 1980s don't disappear. They just keep rocking out in Oregon: Rindy Ross of Quarterflash; Valerie Day of Nu Shooz; and Bill Wadhams of Animation. They all live here. So does Davis. Well, sort of. For the last three years that "dark-haired beauty with the smoky eyes" has lived what she calls a "country girl" life on a remote farm located on the way to the Oregon coast. Davis lives with four dogs, 10 cats and all the necessary equipment needed to make her unique brand of music.

Although she's far from the hustle of the Los Angeles music scene, Davis says she still believes she is very much a part of the entertainment biz. Besides, living in Oregon allows her to be close to her daughter and grandchildren and, ultimately, is just her way of "going sane." And Davis has plenty of reasons to want to be "sane."

Born in Berkley, California to "fabulously dysfunctional" parents, Davis learned three guitar chords by the age of 8. By 20 she had her first band, the Warfield Foxes, as well as two kids and an ex-husband. The group's first gig was in San Francisco on Halloween night, 1971. Soon after she lost both of her parents — her mother from suicide and her father from complications of the flu.

On Mother's Day in 1979, her band, now called The Motels, signed to Capitol Records where they recorded five albums and made several music videos with the likes of (now mega-huge movie director) David Fincher. She even read for the lead part in a little film called *Blue Velvet*. "The original script was much scarier," says Davis.

In '87 The Motels broke up and Davis recorded her first solo album. Even though she has continued to perform under The Motels moniker, she's pretty much been on her own ever since and has continued to be a big hit in, of all places, Australia. Now, at age 58, she



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