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music BY BRETT CAMPBELL

Stella Chiweshe (left) performs at WOW Hall on Friday, Aug. 15.

Robert Earl Keen (below) is at WOW Hall on Saturday Aug. 9.



World-Wide WOW

Zimbabwean mbira mistress leads world music parade in August.

For music of the world, the WOW Hall is the place to be in August. On Friday, Aug. 15, the pioneering mbira player **Stella Chiweshe** from Zimbabwe brings her trio to town, joined by our local African music masters **Kudana**. Mbira is one of those instruments you really have to hear to appreciate; neither the usual shorthand, "thumb piano," nor the description (iron keys fixed to a calabash and played inside a gourd) give any indication of how wonderfully liquid a sound the thumb-plucked instrument can produce, nor how dazzling its intricate interlocking melodies can be.

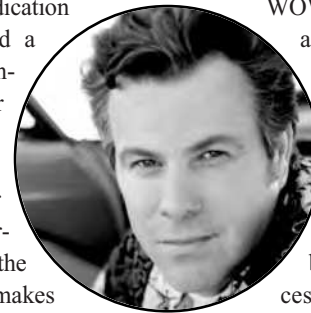
The Shona people, for whom mbira forms an important part of spirituality, call the instrument "the spirit that makes the rain," which we Oregonians can relate to — and even crave this time of year. "It is like tuned raindrops," Chiweshe has said. She's pushed for decades for women's right to play this hypnotic traditional music in public, and is still the only woman in her homeland of Zimbabwe to lead her own band, usually combining the mbira with marimba, hosho (rattle) and vocals, but sometimes adding electric bass and other instruments. Known for her striking stage presence (including falling into trances), Chiweshe is credited with popularizing the mbira-marimba ensemble and combining traditional sounds with modern influences (sometimes receiving the same criticism Sam Cooke and Ray Charles did when they combined sacred and secular sounds). She has spread the spirit of mbira all over the world, so this could be one of the year's top world music shows.

On Thursday, Aug. 7, Hawaiian slack-key guitar masters **George Kuo**, **Martin Pahinui**, and the **Aaron Mahi Group** bring those languid, entrancing sounds to town. Pahinui, a gifted singer as well, is from the first family of slack key and has played with most of the best known groups, while Mahi brings classical training to the mix. If you've never heard this delicious, relaxing yet rich musical style, a hybrid of Pacific Island and Portuguese sounds, give this show a try. If you have, you'll probably be there anyway.

For faster-paced world guitar wizardry, the WOW offers the Brazilian guitar pair

Duofel on Sunday, Aug. 17. Fans of rhythmically vital guitar (from Gipsy Kings to Ottmar Liebert) should appreciate their intricate interplay. More world music hits the WOW Wednesday, Aug. 20 when the WOW brings the traditional Latvian sounds of **Ilgi**.

They say Texas is like a whole other country (and, as a Texpatiate myself, I can agree), so maybe the WOW Hall's Saturday, Aug. 9 show also qualifies as world music.



Robert Earl Keen first gained renown as Lyle Lovett's college roommate and songwriting partner, then attracted attention from even the frat boy crowd with his wild and often hilarious ballads of drunken or violent excess. Since then, Keen has blossomed into a country-folk storyteller of the first order who puts on a compelling live show featuring one of Austin's best guitarists, Rich Brotherton. If you like songs that tell stories, brayed with rare wit, humor, and character insight in the tradition of Lovett and other Lone Star greats, give Keen a try — especially since he'll be joined for this show by Austinite-turned-Seattlite **Danny Barnes**, whose punk/bluegrass banjo is alone worth the ticket.

Another Austin-based artist, **Matt the Electrician**, is a big fan of Barnes and should appeal to the same fans. He's opening for the acoustic jazz/folk ensemble Asylum Street Spankers on Aug. 14. Their high spirited shows run the gamut from 1920s jazz to blues to rap to swing and much in between.

If all those guitarists and John Pizzarelli aren't enough for you this month, on Friday, Aug. 8, former Eugene resident **David Acker** plays a solo show at Luna. The inventive New York guitarist has played with musicians such as Jack McDuff, Nat Adderly, Eartha Kitt, and a passel of well known R&B groups like the Drifters, and recorded with the likes of Patti Austin and Digable Planets.

Finally, Luna hosts up-and-coming New York jazz pianist **Deanna Witkowski** on Thursday, Aug. 14. She's a composer as well, writing jazz masses and other sacred music, sometimes incorporating Brazilian and Latin rhythms.

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