

Dark Back Roads

Balint is back, along with Heini.

Hungarian-born actress and musician **Eszter Balint** will return to Eugene's Cafe Paradiso on July 9 appearing along with **Dayna Kurtz**. Balint is touring in support of her new Bar/None release *Mud*. Though she lived in Hungary until the age of 10 and has lived in New York, Los Angeles and France since, Balint's music is infused with a rural American coolness, an artsy twist on traditional American forms of folk. *Mud*, Balint's second release following 2000's *Flicker*, features Balint's enchanting, gothic-tinged voice, violins, vibes, piano, pedal steel and French horn, along with a feeling of "dark back roads of country and blues, as well as rock." I spoke with Balint by phone from her New York home recently, to find out more about what motivates this accomplished actress to make such sparse, dark music.

"I don't ever sit down and try to come up with a conceptual approach to the music I'll be making. I just write what I hear in my head, and for some reason I've listened to all kinds of music in my life and I think that maybe some of those roots-based folk, blues, country-ish things have penetrated a part of my brain and feel familiar to me at this point. I think there's something universal about that sort of music."

She goes on to describe the folk tradition as feeling more like a foundation on which to make other types of music rather than a particular type of music all its own and says, "It has a basic, fundamental feeling, which appeals to me."

Balint had an early, successful film career, and it wasn't unexpected that she would gravitate toward writing her own songs. She had studied classical violin as a young girl and voice as a young woman. "I've always been a writer, keeping notebooks or whatever, and after a while it just made sense to put the two pursuits together," she explains. Her Hungarian parents were part of a popular the-

ater group known as Squat Theater. At the age of 10, Balint, her parents and the theater company moved from Hungary to Paris for a year and a half. The company then relocated to New York City, next door to the legendary Chelsea Hotel, and a young Balint continued stage performances. At age 15 she clicked on screen in Jim Jarmusch's cult classic film *Stranger Than Paradise*. That role garnered her other work in *The Linguini Incident*, *Shadows and Fog*, and *Trees Lounge*, for which Balint co-wrote and performed "Color of Your Eyes." She's had music used in other films including 2002's *Lovely and Amazing*. The seven years Balint spent in Los Angeles "extinguished whatever small flames of passion" she felt for the film industry, and now she is not seeking film work, though having her music used in cool films would be great. Balint is currently touring to support *Mud* and "gestating ideas" for an upcoming record.

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What do a karaoke machine, The Decemberists and a fifth grade journal have in common? The answer is one of Eugene's favorite musicians, **Tom Heini**. Heini recently embarked upon a very successful March through April, 30-day national tour with Portland act The Decemberists, a band that features former longtime Eugene residents and that has been gaining fame across the nation with their two full-length releases. That serendipitous tour came about when Decemberists member and former Eugene resident Chris Funk approached Heini about touring with them. At the end of that tour, Heini played a couple shows with Bloodshot recording artist

Bobby Bare Jr., a happy confluence that quickly led to a second national tour. With the Decemberists, Heini played nightly to sold-out crowds, a feat that awed him, but left him uncomfortable.

"Isn't it ridiculous? I just have to not think about it and try to have fun. I just block it all out. Just try to have fun and meet people," says the down-to-earth Heini speaking by phone from the road. "When I left, my website had 800 hits on it in a three-year period then when I got back after 30 days it was 8,000." While that experience marked the first time Heini had toured the states, he's now back on the road supporting Bobby Bare Jr., son of the legendary country singer Bobby Bare Sr. and the two will be performing at Sam Bond's on July 10. With Bobby Bare Jr., Heini has been gone since June 20 and won't return until July 18, a long stretch that will culminate in Little Rock, Ark.

Heini's recent release, *With*

they're waiting for their band to come on. I bring my stereo, and I bring my chair, my lamp, and I just start singing to four track tapes of myself," explains Heini, whose show is rife with self-deprecating comic lines guarantees to bring a smile to even the hardest of hearts. "It's really fun to do. It's like doing karaoke."

Now that The Decemberists' New York-based booking agent is booking him, a three-week August tour with Sebadoh looks extremely likely, and "a new glorified home tape or maybe a kid's record" for Leisure King is on the agenda. Heini's new-found popularity has changed his everyday life quite a bit. He quit his job, which he held for

13 years, at popular downtown restaurant Anatolia and put all of his belongings in storage. Now, with his cell phone, his trusty karaoke machine and his fifth grade journal (which you can read online at www.tomheini.com), he's spreading the Heini gospel to appreciative, if admittedly a little

confused, congregations across the country. **EW**



Or Without Me on Eugene-based label Leisure King features two parts which Heini calls "Stereoke." The first "With Me" section has vocals to humorous and witty songs like "Peein' In An Empty," "Christmas Tree On Fire" and "IHOP" while the second "Without Me" section contains only music, so that listeners can sing along with the help of an included lyric booklet. On stage, "I'm just doing the Stereoke thing, so it's pretty funny. People like to have a good laugh while

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