

Sensuous, Passionate Roots Rock Reggae

I-chèle and the Circle of Light celebrate new CD

There's nothing traditional about I-chèle — you've probably seen her around town; she's a recognizable figure with waist-length dreadlocks and leopard print dress. I-chèle grew up in New York City, where she studied theater and dance, but she craved a more natural life than what the East Coast could offer.

Once transplanted to Oregon, I-chèle enjoyed country living and met a musician who became the father of her son. "He covered me in the umbrella of music," she says. This was the '70s, and the couple played on the streets and in cafés. During their separation I-chèle began playing more guitar. Then she met Bibbs Goff, a musician from Belize and "a musical uncle" to many around town. He brought her into a reggae band called Arousing Spirits. Circle of Light came to be after years of playing with Goff, and about seven years ago became I-chèle and the Circle of Light.

I-chèle's last recording, a cassette from 1993, has its charm, but her newest, *Salon d'Esoterica*, is something to be proud of. Her reggae is a potent mixture of rootsy rock — spare except when highlighted by sax, violin, trumpet or keyboards — and smooth, liquid vocals; it's what you might expect if Sade switched from jazzy R&B to reggae.

The CD was produced and mixed by Vince Black, a Eugene resident who has worked in reggae and blues for decades. His musical accomplishments include performing and recording with Black Uhuru, Andrew Tosh, Wailing Souls, Prezident Brown, Eek-a-Mouse, Lee Perry, Ken Boothe ... everyone who's anyone in reggae. I-chèle and Black met backstage after a Circle of Light gig. Since then, I-chèle says, Black has "fortified my musical life ... he's the wind beneath my wings. Vince mixed the music so that it's lush ... it's sensuous in a way that is appropriate for all ages."



I-chèle and the Circle of Light, Funtifyno
9 pm Friday, 2/16
McShane's • \$5 • 21+

Circle of Light was the backing band for the Northwest Showcase of the 2006 Northwest World Reggae Fest, an experience I-chèle describes as "amazing."

I-chèle doesn't find being a woman to be an obstacle in reggae and says most women really want to hear women sing. "There's a respect I know I'm obligated to have for this music," she says, "because I was wandering around and found it and wanted to come into it, but that wasn't the house I grew up in. I always give props to the sisters who paved the way for other women." **EW**

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